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GERALD BRECKENRIDGE

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The

RADIO BOYS IN DARKEST AFRICA

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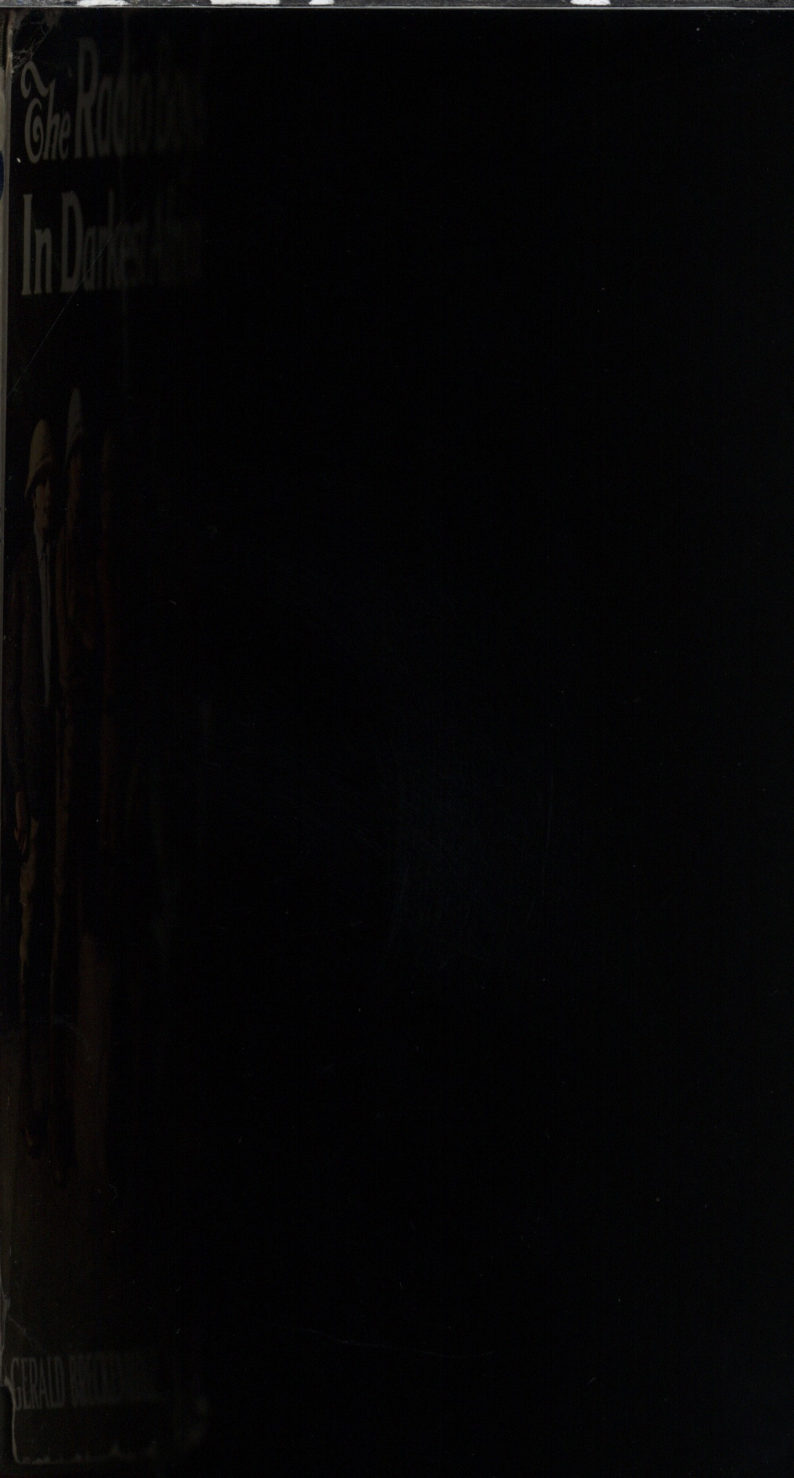

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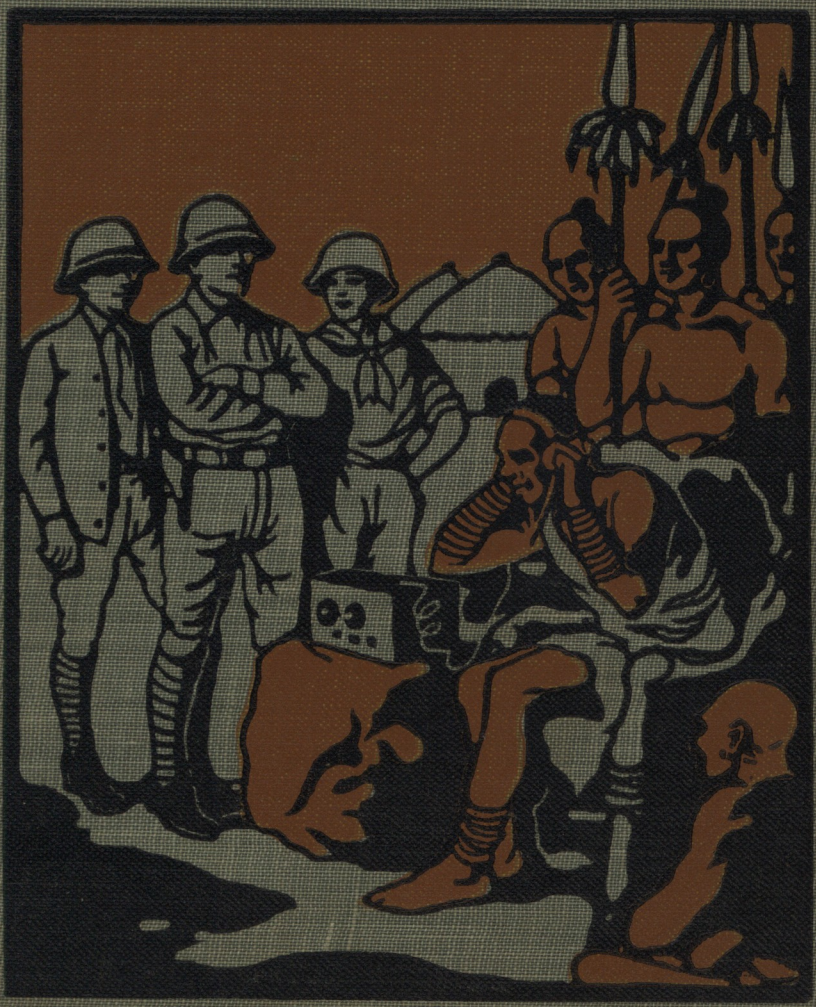

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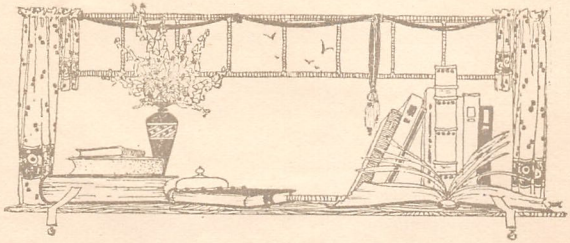

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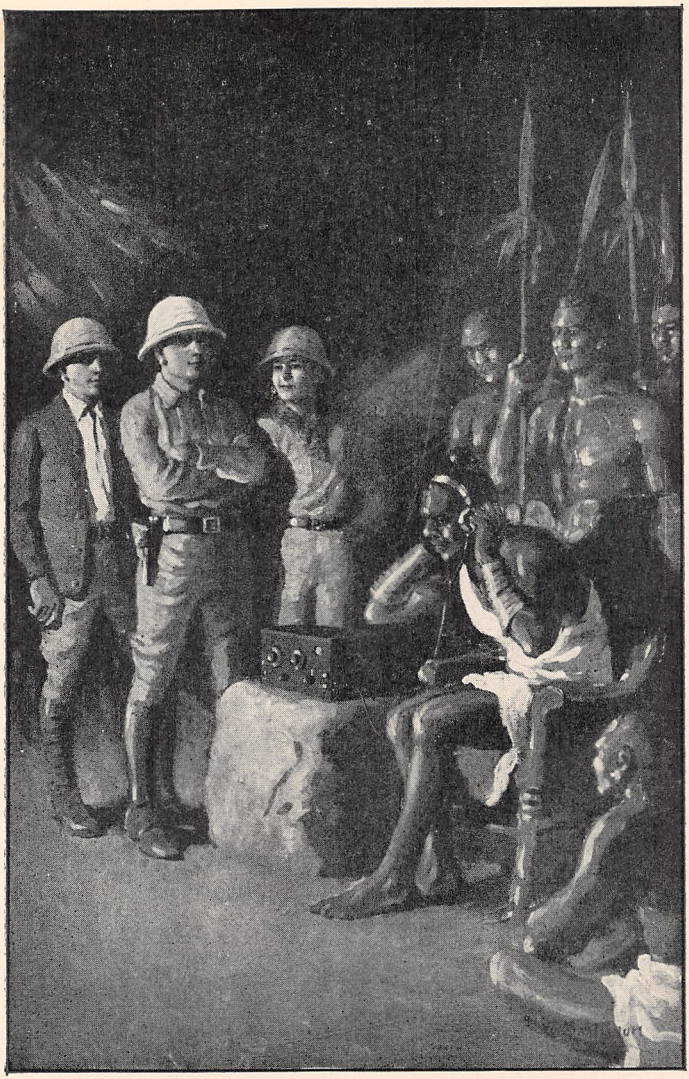


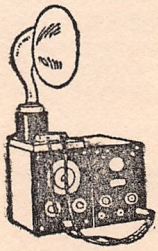
"You certainly won his heart that time, Bob." "Look at his face if you want to see real amazement."
(*Page 75*) (*The Radio Boys in Darkest Africa.*)

THE RADIO BOYS IN DARKEST AFRICA

By GERALD BRECKENRIDGE

Author of

"The Radio Boys on the Mexican Border," "The Radio Boys with the Revenue Guards," "The Radio Boys on Secret Service Duty," "The Radio Boys Search for the Inca's Treasure," "The Radio Boys Rescue the Lost Alaska Expedition," "The Radio Boys Seek the Lost Atlantis."



Frontispiece

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THE

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THE RADIO BOYS IN DARKEST AFRICA

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THE RADIO BOYS IN DARKEST AFRICA.

CHAPTER I.

WIMBA'S TRIAL.

"Look here, Jack, we ought to do something to help Wimba. I don't believe he's getting a square deal."

"Nor I, Frank. But what can we do? Chief Ruku-Ru is supreme here. And if he decides against Wimba——"

Jack Hampton's tone was as near hopeless as one could ever expect to hear from the lips of that optimistic young adventurer.

Nor is that to be wondered at. The predicament of their head man, Wimba, a Kikuya of superior parts whose services they had been fortunate enough to obtain at Nairobi, administrative capital of British East Africa or Kenya Colony, was serious.

Here on the far fringe of the Kikuyu country, several hundred miles from Nairobi, the nearest outpost of white civilization in Central Africa, Wimba was being tried on a charge of murder. Chief Ruku-Ru, head of the local tribesmen, presiding as judge, gave every indication of being about to sentence Wimba to death.

And the two boys knew Wimba was innocent. They believed the latter's story. Wimba said he had come upon two local tribesmen stealing from the effects of his employers and that, when discovered, they had attacked him. Fighting in self-defense he had been unfortunate enough to kill one, whereupon the other had run to Chief Ruku-Ru with the tale that Wimba had murdered his comrade.

During the course of the trial, which was being held beneath a great thorn tree, Jack Hampton and Frank Merrick had been breathless spectators. Their companion, Bob Temple, lay weak from fever in his tent, and could not be present.

In an old armchair which had been brought by a trader years before to this remote village, sat Chief Ruku-Ru, as if in a throne. His hair was drawn to a knob on the very top of his round head. His black face was preternaturally grave as became an administrator of justice. Around his neck were a

half dozen strands of copper wire. His arms were covered from wrist to elbow with bracelets of similar material. Thrown across his right shoulder and drawn together beneath his left armpit was the single cotton garment which constituted his only clothing. And in his right hand he held a number of small sticks. These were important. If the prosecution scored a point in the testimony, he planted a stick in the ground on the right. If Wimba's defense scored a point, he planted a stick on his left. At the end of the trial, he would count the number of sticks in each row and that side having the greater number would win.

This much had been explained to the boys by Wimba's assistant, an intelligent young Kikuyu named Matse. But the latter's command of English was not much to lean upon, and he could not inform the boys of every point in the case. From him, however, they had learned enough to realize that Wimba was drawing near the end of his defense, and that the prosecution had the better of it. The pile of sticks on the right was larger.

"If only Dad was here," groaned Jack, in a whisper.

But Mr. Hampton, together with Oscar Nielsen, their cameraman, was off on an expedition to photo-

graph wild animals at a water hole many miles away.

Frank squirmed at his companion's side. "Jack, I've got an idea. It's a long chance, but it may work."

"What is it?"

For a minute or two Frank whispered in Jack's ear, and the latter's face lighted up.

"What do you think of it?" asked Frank, in conclusion, drawing back. "Will it work?"

"We'll chance it," whispered Jack, in reply, nodding. "But you'll have to be quick. Now scud away with Matse and leave me to do my part."

Without further waste of words or time, Frank drawing the young Kikuyu interpreter after him drew back amongst the grass-thatched huts of the Kikuyu village fringing the council square.

His departure was unnoticed by the big crowd of tribesfolk gathered in a circle, and hanging upon the progress of the trial.

The minutes passed and with the passage of each one Jack grew more anxious. But presently Frank again slipped into position beside him.

"Thank goodness," he whispered, breathlessly, "that we rigged up that loud speaker in the council tree last night."

"Yes," replied Jack, "and that we haven't had a

chance to try it out yet. Nobody knows it's there. But was Bob all right?"

"A little weak yet," replied Frank. "But he took charge of operations, all right. Was tickled to death."

"Well, we meant to give them a concert out of the council tree," said Jack. "But this will be better. Wonder we didn't think of it before."

"Oh, well," replied Frank, "so long as the idea came to us in time, what does it matter?"

"But Matse?" asked Jack, anxiously. "Does he understand the part he'll have to play? Will he handle it all right?"

Frank smiled confidently. "When I give him the signal," he said, "Matse will do his part, never fear. He'd undertake anything in order to save Wimba. But we're not out of the woods yet, Jack. We don't know what's going on. Oh, if we only had another boy who could speak English and could translate this for us."

Jack gripped his companion's arm. "Look, Frank, the trial is over. Now Chief Ruku-Ru is about to pronounce sentence. See. Wimba is staring hard at us. Poor fellow, he believes his end has come and what a look of dumb appeal. Up, Frank, it's time to act I'm sure."

From their place on the outskirts and a little to

one side of the semi-circle of savages, Frank and Jack rose with white determined faces and advanced the few steps necessary to bring them face to face with Chief Ruku-Ru seated opposite across the open space surrounding him.

The tall warriors forming the chief's guard, coal-black, six foot tall, magnificent specimens of manhood, stood aghast. What did the white strangers contemplate?

Chief Ruku-Ru half rose from his chair in anger at this interruption. But before he could give a command to have the boys seized, if such discourtesy to his guests was contemplated, Jack holding himself proudly erect addressed the throne.

"Oh, great chief," he cried in English, "we be strangers in your land, it is true. Yet have we watched with interest the progress of this trial, and your impartial conduct. But we believe you have been deceived by liars amongst those who seek Wimba's life. Therefore we appeal to our gods to speak from the sky and tell you the truth. Wimba," he commanded, "tell the chief what I have said. Forget nothing. There will be a voice from the sky and in the chief's own language. Do not fear. But speak quickly."

From his position between two tall Kikuyu warriors, Wimba who stood to the left of the chief, had

been listening in blankest astonishment. His strong face with the thin lips and intelligent lines of many of the Kikuyu tribesmen had betrayed as much despair as his self-restraint under ordeal would permit him to betray, when Jack had begun to speak. But now not only the despair but the succeeding astonishment disappeared.

"Speak Wimba," commanded Jack. "Remember what you placed in the council tree for us last night."

He was safe, he knew, in thus reminding Wimba, as none in the audience had any knowledge of English. And he had explained enough of the mysteries of radio the previous night, when the entire village slept after heavy potations of native beer following a royal reception to the new guests, to give Wimba confidence now that Jack would be able as he promised to bring a voice seemingly out of the sky.

At any rate, Wimba was in a desperate situation. He was ready to grasp at any straw. Gazing about he saw the multitude of natives crowding close, awaiting the verdict. He saw Chief Ruku-Ru open-mouthed at the white boy's interruption. He knew if he were going to act, he must act at once. Otherwise the chief would order the interrupters seized, perhaps; and most certainly would order him slain.

And he could not contemplate being staked out on an ant hill with equanimity.

Bowing low, Wimba addressed Chief Ruku-Ru in a loud voice. The boys could not understand his words, for he spoke in the Kikuyu tongue. But they could perceive that he was making their startling announcement, for over the chief's face spread a look of startled bewilderment while through the swarm of natives sweeping around behind them in a semi-circle passed a murmur like a wind rippling the surface of a lake.

They watched Wimba closely, and saw the perspiration burst on his face. He was speaking in deadly earnestness, for it was a matter of life or death to him.

When Wimba ceased, Chief Ruku-Ru appeared to pull himself together and he addressed a few sharp words to Wimba in a contemptuous tone.

"He's scared, but doesn't want to show it," was Jack's whispered comment.

Frank nodded, but did not reply. His face was on that of Wimba. He knew the crisis had come. And the prisoner's words confirmed his belief.

"Bring the voice from the sky, baas," said Wimba. "The chief says he does not believe, but he is afraid."

Frank was pale as death. Stepping a few paces

in front of Jack, he paused in the middle of the open space before Chief Ruku-Ru's armchair throne. Then lifting his eyes skyward, as if appealing to some Deity in the brazen vault overhead, he put his fingers between his lips and emitted a piercing whistle. Once, twice, thrice, it shrilled.

Silence.

Over all that assemblage of savage black men, over the group of bearers cowering to one side, awaiting the verdict upon their comrade, over the old gray-haired elders in a knot near the chief, over the tall warriors of the guard with their spears, over the ring of warriors with their shields of painted bullock and elephant hide on the ground before them, over the pushing mass of women and children behind, spread a deathlike silence.

Every eye was lifted in awe. Every face gazed skyward. The words of the white young men as interpreted by Wimba had spread unbelievable amazement. They waited, fascinated, half believing, half terrified, for the voice from the sky which the white men had promised.

Then it came.

From the top of the great council tree apparently boomed out a voice in the Kikuyu tongue. It was a voice unknown to them all. It was a voice the

volume of which seemed supernatural. Yet every word was clear. And this great voice cried:

"Oh, Chief Ruku-Ru, great amongst the Kikuyus, I am the spirit invoked by the white men. Their fate is in my keeping. I watch over them and their servants. And I tell you that Wimba is guiltless. Let but a hair of his head be touched and thy village shall be levelled, thy people destroyed by plague, thy cattle die, thy springs dry up. I have spoken. Set Wimba free or these things shall come to pass. It is an order."

CHAPTER II.

THE GODS SPEAK.

THROUGH the ranks of the Kikuyu tribesmen behind and encircling them, Jack and Frank could hear a murmur of fear that grew in volume until the air was filled with cries of fright. The warriors forming the inner ring of the circle shook with terror.

So, too, did those tallest of the Kikuyus forming the chief's own bodyguard. As for Chief Ruku-Ru, over his face spread an ashen hue.

But Frank's programme was not yet complete. In the few minutes with Bob and Matse in their tent beyond the grass-thatched village huts, he had concocted a second step which he assumed would clinch their hold over the chief and assure the complete terrorization of the Kikuyus. Now he proceeded to put this into execution.

Standing alone in the midst of the great circle of savage blacks, facing the ashen chief, noting the spears of the bodyguard trembling like forest trees

in a strong wind as the hands which held them shook with terror, he was filled with satisfaction. So far all had gone well. Now to strike the final blow.

"Quick, Wimba," he cried to the prisoner, who alone of that alien multitude had any inkling as to the source of that mysterious voice from the sky, yet who was not sufficiently civilized to be free entirely from the terror which gripped the other blacks. "Quick, Wimba. Translate for me." And facing the chief, Frank cried:

"Oh, Chief Ruku-Ru, thou hast heard the response of our gods. To show you there is none concealed within the council tree, who might have said these things, for it is thence came the voice, I ask that you order your warriors to discharge their arrows into the midst of the foliage."

Well Frank knew that in the great hollow on the back side the main trunk, so opportunely found the previous night, the loud speaker and its connections would be safe from stray arrows. Furthermore, the loop aerial employed was securely lashed amidst a thick bushy mass of leaves, and likewise would be safe from harm.

But Chief Ruku-Ru was past giving any orders. He attempted to speak, upon Wimba translating Frank's words, but was unable to command his

stricken tongue. Nor did the warriors of his body-guard upon hearing Frank's injunction show any inclination to shoot into the top of the sacred tree. That they were terror-stricken was plain to be seen. And equally plain was their reluctance to antagonize any supernatural agency which Frank had invoked.

This Frank had counted upon. Drawing his revolver, he levelled it at the treetops and himself announced that he would make the test. This Wimba translated. Again a murmur of awe swept through the encircling mass of natives.

Frank fired. Three shots he pumped into the treetop. Scarcely had the echo died away, and before Chief Ruku-Ru or anybody else, either, for that matter, could speak, than the voice from the air rang again in the Kikuyu tongue.

"I am a Spirit," it cried. "Neither white man's thunder nor Kikuyu arrows can avail against me. Obey, O Chief Ruku-Ru, or thy country shall be laid under my spell. Set Wimba free."

Neither Frank nor Jack could understand what was said. But well they knew that Matse was merely uttering into the broadcasting phone in their tent, while Bob manipulated the motor, those statements which upon his signals Frank had arranged he should declaim. And that such was the case was apparent

from the profound and devastating effect upon the chief and his followers.

It was unnecessary for Wimba to translate the messages from the air for the boys' benefit.

Chief Ruku-Ru managed upon the dying away of the mysterious voice to gain some control over himself. Not for nothing was he chief. His self-command was remarkable. The more so in view of the fact that he was as profoundly impressed and terror-stricken by these manifestations which Frank had evoked as was the meanest of his followers.

He did not rise from his armchair throne, for the very good reason that he feared his treacherous knees would give way beneath him. But he did manage to speak.

Pointing to the two guards who clasped Wimba on either side, he ordered them to release their prisoner. To Frank and Jack, tense and anxious regarding the outcome of their experiment, his words were as so much Greek. But they were left in no doubt as to their meaning.

The guards at once untied the cords binding Wimba's wrists together behind his back and unwound the heavier rope about his right ankle tying him to a stake in the ground. Likewise they released their grip on his arms. Then they bowed low to him.

A moment Wimba stood uncertain. He was dazed. He could hardly believe his good fortune. He gazed first at the chief, then at the encircling natives, half of whom were poised for flight, fearing a further demonstration by the white man's god, and finally brought his eyes to bear upon Frank.

Then with an inarticulate cry of gratitude, he rushed across the intervening space, and threw himself on the ground. Tears streaming from his eyes, he clasped Frank's feet and in broken sentences thanked him for his deliverance.

"Get up, Wimba," commanded Frank. "Tell Chief Ruku-Ru that our Great Spirit is about to bless him for this deed."

Once more Wimba faced the chief and in a voice trembling with feeling he repeated Frank's words.

Then Frank initated the final step in his hastily-thought-out plan. Setting his fingers to his lips he whistled. But this time only twice. It was the agreed signal.

From the air boomed forth again the mysterious voice

"O, Chief Ruku-Ru, thy name shall be great as an administrator of justice. Thy tribe shall be fruitful, thy cattle fat, thy springs filled with sweet water. I have spoken."

Silence.

"Let's make our getaway now, Frank," whispered Jack. "We've gotten out of this a whole lot better than we had any right to expect. Don't tempt fate too much."

But filled with the confidence of success, Frank only smiled. He whispered to Wimba, and the latter addressing Chief Ruku-Ru announced that in honor of the occasion his white masters would that night bring music from the air, and that they invited the whole tribe to assemble after dusk before the council tree.

With this, leaving the chief and all the assemblage stunned, the boys and Wimba departed. As they moved away, the Kikuyus opened a passage for them in grotesque haste. Now that the strain of the situation was over, both Frank and Jack were seized with an insane desire to laugh. But they managed to control their emotions, and to retain upon their faces a look of the most solemn gravity. Only when at length they had passed out of earshot of the multitude and had put the last of the grass-thatched huts behind them, did they give way to their feelings. Then they flung themselves prone into the long buffalo grass of the meadow separating the village from their encampment and rolling over and over they simply howled with laughter

while Wimba watched them in the greatest astonishment.

"I'll never forget that scene to my dying day," laughed Jack, finally.

"Nor I," said Frank, weak from hysterical laughter. "Come on. Let's find Bob, and tell him how it worked out."

Before he could strike away, however, Jack sobering turned to Wimba. Laying a hand on Frank's shoulder, he said:

"Wimba, here is the fellow who saved your life. It was his idea. He'll explain it all to you. It is to him you must give your thanks first, and then to your comrade Matse who helped."

"Oh, come, Jack," said Frank uncomfortably.

But Wimba threw himself once more at Frank's feet.

"My life belong you, baas," he said in a choking voice.

CHAPTER III.

CAMERA SHOOTING.

In after days, Frank was to remember with thankfulness the gratitude of Wimba for his "baas" or master. But now he was embarrassed, and making light of the matter as possible without hurting the black's feelings he hastened along by Jack's side across the meadow toward the clump of tents which marked their encampment.

Leaving Jack and Frank to regale the convalescent Bob with the tale of what had occurred under the council tree, while Wimba and Matse put their heads together and discussed the same event surrounded by the awe-stricken native bearers from whom Wimba, at Frank's warning, was careful to withhold the real explanation, let us consider briefly how the three white boys came to be here in Central Africa.

For those of our readers who have not followed their adventures in other parts of the world as set forth in previous volumes of The Radio Boys Series

a brief word or two of introduction is necessary. Jack Hampton was the only son of an internationally famous engineer and explorer, whose wife had died when Jack was only a youngster. Frank Merrick, too, was orphaned and made his home with Bob Temple, whose father was his guardian. The Hampton and Temple country estates on the far end of Long Island, New York, adjoined each other. And the three boys, companions at preparatory school and now at Yale, were the closest of friends.

Supplied by wealthy parents with the means to gratify their scientific bent, all three boys from the beginning of the popularity of Radio had pushed their investigations in that field. And upon the numerous adventures into which they had been drawn in one way or another in South America, Alaska, their own land, and the Sahara Desert in Africa, they had found Radio time and again prove of the greatest service.

Now, as has been related in the previous chapters, it had again come to the fore to help them at a crisis in their affairs.

But how did they come to be again in Africa, where the previous year they had discovered in an unexplored mountain region in the southern Sahara a race of white men living in a high state of develop-

ment and treasuring ancient papyrus records indicating continued existence of the race from the earliest period of the world's history?

That is easily explained.

So widespread was the publicity showered upon the Radio Boys, as they had become known, following their repeated exploits in out-of-the-way corners of the world that one of the great motion picture concerns of America had come to them some months previously with a fine offer. Would they accompany a cameraman into Central Africa to explore little known or entirely unknown regions for the purpose of filming wild animals in their natural haunts and natives in the primitive state? That was the proposition, and, needless to state, the motion picture concern propounding it agreed to make acceptance worth the boys' while.

Mr. Hampton was included in the offer. And upon his advice, coupled with that of Mr. Temple, the boys had yielded to their natural inclinations and had accepted.

"You boys have still some years of college ahead of you," Mr. Temple had said. "It may be unwise to interrupt your college career, for such an expedition necessarily will be an interruption, as, undoubtedly, you will be a year or two in the wilds. Nevertheless, Central Africa cannot remain unexplored or

unopened to civilization much longer. Here is a chance such as may never come your way again.

"Sometime, doubtless, Jack will want to become an engineer and follow in his father's footsteps, and Frank and Bob will want to take charge of the export business, Frank's father before he died and I, built up. But there is no hurry about those matters. In the meantime, here is a chance for the three of you to go on a big game hunting expedition with the strangest of weapons—a motion picture camera. And you will be well paid, to boot.

"Of course, the fame you fellows have piled up brought you this opportunity. Well, you deserve it. Three more rattle-brained rascals with the ability always to fall on their feet I never saw." He smiled at them affectionately. "So," he concluded, "I consent to Bob and Frank going. And as Jack's father already has consented for him and is, besides, to head the expedition, I cannot see but what that settles the matter."

Here, then, they were. From Mombasa on the east coast they had made their way on the railroad to Nairobi. This small but important settlement, which was the administrative center of Kenya Colony, marked their last touch with civilization.

Procuring bearers and guides, they had thence set out afoot into the Kikuyu country. Day had

followed day without striking incident. The Kikuyus are a peaceful people, above the average of African intelligence, inhabiting a magnificent country abounding in streams, uplands and forest. It is one of the most healthful and fertile of regions.

Although, despite their proximity to the advance guards of white civilization, the boys had found the Kikuyus still living in primitive state, nevertheless they found them peaceful. Adventures had been few. Not only had they seldom been in any danger from the natives, but wild animals also had been scarce.

It was not until they came to Chief Ruku-Ru's territory where Mr. Hampton had departed with Niellsen, the cameraman, for the dried-up bed of a river where baboons were said to be in the habit of coming to dig for water, that the first real adventure befell them. That was the arrest and trial of Wimba, and his consequent release as related.

It was only by accident that the boys were on hand. Ordinarily they would have been with Mr. Hampton and Niellsen. But Bob's succumbing to fever had kept them behind to provide him with company and attendance. Bob's fever was not sufficiently strong enough to cause Mr. Hampton any real anxiety, however, so, leaving the boys careful instructions regarding the medicines to be given

their comrade, he had departed with Niellsen and a few bearers carrying camera, film box, etc.

With this digression, let us return to camp. The quick-falling African night was closing in and the boys were finishing preparations for the concert which they had promised to bring out of the air to the assembled villagers about the council tree.

Frank and Jack had just completed a complete overhauling of the talking machine which they planned to use and were dusting off the records of martial band music which they considered would provide the most acceptable concert for savage ears. Bob who was feeling considerably improved was lolling on a camp cot, watching them.

"Hey, fellows," he said suddenly, "has it occurred to you that some warrior more curious and less fearful than the rest might climb up into the council tree? If one does, and if he finds the aerial or the loud speaker which you concealed there, good night. Even if he ran away from it, he might damage it first so that your concert would be a fizzle."

Jack stopped work, a record in one hand, dusting cloth in the other.

"That's right, Bob. Hadn't thought of that."

But Frank looked unconcerned.

"From what Wimba and Matse tell me," he said,

"Most Kikuyus wouldn't dare to climb into that sacred tree. I had a hard time getting even those two to ascend it with me last night and help locate our traps. And they've lived in Nairobi and come in contact with the whites and have lost some of their native superstitions. And now that we caused the voice of our mysterious spirit to emanate from the tree today, I feel pretty sure there isn't a Kikuyu whom you could pay to climb it."

Jack looked relieved, but Bob apparently was reluctant to relinquish his idea and needed further convincing.

"Just the same," he said, "I believe we ought to send somebody over there to scout around for us and see that everything is all right before we pin our hopes on giving a concert. Why not send Matse?"

"All right, if you think it's necessary," replied Frank. "Let's call him in."

Putting aside the records he had been cleaning, he went to the door of the tent and, lifting the flap, poked his head out to utter the necessary call which would bring Matse from the bearer's camp nearby.

But the call was not issued. Instead, Bob and Jack heard Frank utter a muffled exclamation and then step swiftly out of the tent, letting the flap fall behind him.

CHAPTER IV.

WIMBA SAVED AGAIN.

THE two boys left behind in the tent stared perplexedly at each other in the light of the lantern hanging from the pole and casting a steady if not brilliant illumination over the canvas walls, bed rolls, packs and camp chairs. From his bed roll or flea bag, as the boys adopting the term of African explorers had come to call it, the outstretched Bob, propped on one elbow, looked toward the tent flap which had fallen behind his comrade and said:

"Gosh, Frank went out of there as if somebody had grabbed him by the hair. Wonder what he's up to."

"I'll go see," said Jack, getting up from his seat on a folding camp chair, and walking toward the exit.

But just as he was putting out his hand to draw the flap aside there came the sound of three revolver shots in rapid succession from nearby, followed by a hubbub of native cries. Jack leaped through the

exit, drawing his automatic from its ever-ready position at his side, while Bob jumped to his feet with all thought of weakness forgotten.

Before he could follow Jack's example, however, the tent flap was again thrust aside and Jack returned followed by Frank.

The latter's face was white. In one hand he still gripped his automatic.

Bob stared at his comrades in astonishment too great for a moment for speech. And in the silence the yells of the natives could be heard withdrawing into the distance.

Frank flung himself into a camp chair. His revolver dropped from his relaxed fingers, and he put up his hands to his face. Bob saw he was trembling. Jack stooped and put an arm across his comrade's shoulders.

"What in the world's the matter?" cried Bob, finding his tongue at last. "What happened?"

"I haven't got it straightened out," said Jack, shaking his head. "It was all over when I got outside. Give Frank a minute's time to collect himself. He had a bad experience, I guess." He patted the smaller youth's shoulder. "Take your time, old boy," he said soothingly. "It's all over now."

Bob sank back onto his flea bag. This was too

much for him, his expression of profound bewilderment seemed to say.

Frank looked up and essayed a smile. But it was ghastly in result.

"Guess you fellows think I'm crazy," he said, in a shaking voice. "But it's no joke to have to shoot at a man. I never get over the shakes when it's necessary."

"What?" cried Jack.

"A man?" exploded Bob. "You shot at a man?"

Frank nodded. "It was that fellow who had it in for Wimba, I guess," he said. "The one who charged him with murdering his pal. That Kikuyu thief, you know."

With an effort, he pulled himself together, shook off Jack's grip on his shoulder, and got up. "I poked my head out of the tent to call Matse," he said, in a firmer voice. "The bearers have a big camp fire going. Between here and the camp fire I could see Wimba. He was approaching our tent. There was no mistaking his form, outlined against the glow of the fire. Then I saw a man spring up from the ground as Wimba passed and stalk after him.

"I was scared for Wimba, because the other obviously meant mischief. And it was plain Wimba was unaware of his presence. I didn't want to yell a warning because his pursuer might leap on Wimba.

So I started forward. But the fellow was creeping up on Wimba. I could see them both like silhouettes against the fire glow. There was no time to delay. I could see the rascal's arm drawn back as if to bury a knife in poor old Wimba's shoulders."

"Then you shot?" asked Jack.

Frank nodded. "But I didn't kill him," he said. "I aimed to hit his upraised hand, and I guess I did."

"But there were three shots," objected Bob. "I counted them."

"I shot over his head," said Frank.

"What happened then?" asked Jack.

"He got away. And the bearers are chasing him."

Bob's face became grave. "That's liable to get us into more trouble with Chief Ruku-Ru."

"I sent Wimba to bring the boys back," explained Frank. With a laugh, as his self-possession returned he added: "That was the quickest way to put an end to his expressions of gratitude."

"Well," said Jack, "you certainly have put that fellow in your debt. You've saved his life twice in one day."

With his usual modesty, Frank's thought dwelt not on himself and his own actions, but on the other

fellow. "Poor Wimba," he said. "He certainly had a hard time of it."

The excited voices of the returning bearers could be heard without. Bob sank back on his flea bag as Frank went out to hear Wimba's report. With an exclamation, Jack looked at his watch.

"So much excitement made me almost forget Dad," he remarked, going to the corner where the radio sending apparatus was set up. Taking his seat and adjusting several loose wire connections, he began manipulating controls.

Then he pulled the transmitter toward him and began announcing on a 200-metre wave length a resume of the day's activities, telling in detail of Wimba's arrest and trial and of how he had been saved from execution by Frank's ruse for playing upon Chief Ruku-Ru's superstition through means of the loud speaker installed in the council tree.

"Luckily we keyed it to 300-metres, Dad," he explained. "So when we talk to you like this over your 200-metre length, the loud speaker is inoperative."

He than related the recent episode wherein Frank again had saved Wimba's life, and concluded with the explanation that they were about to broadcast a concert of band music out of the council tree for the further mystification of the Kikuyus.

"Don't worry about us, Dad," he said, before hanging up. "We're making out all right, I expect. I don't look for any more trouble, after what happened today."

Bob grinned as Jack, his task concluded, turned around to face him.

"Well, Mr. Reporter," he said. "You're becoming quite expert at making these daily reports."

Jack laughed. "Just the same," he commented, "it's not a bad idea, that of these individual portable sets. No matter where Dad is, it's a pretty safe bet that he heard me."

Each member of the expeditionary party was provided with a small but powerful portable radio set of wide range. Thus whenever, as in the present instance, anybody was absent on side expeditions by tuning in at a fixed hour each night and morning, he received a resume of the day's activities and of any startling events occurring during the night, which those remaining at the headquarters encampment broadcasted.

These sets were the boys' pride. All three had had a hand in their manufacture. Each set was mounted in a cabinet the size of a portable typewriter case. It contained a regenerative tuner, a detector and one stage of audio amplification, and was a powerful receiver with two tubes. The secret

of its smallness was that it operated on ordinary little flashlight batteries. The head set clamped into the inside of the lid when not in use. Closed, the cabinet could be carried by means of a handle. The whole business weighed less than ten pounds. Throw an insulated wire over a tree, and one would be ready to listen-in.

Almost as compact, in its way, was the sending apparatus which now occupied a small collapsible table in one corner of the tent. Table and all, including the motor, fitted into the oblong box yawning emptily on the ground beneath at the present moment—a box two and a half feet by a foot in breadth and nine inches in height.

In its construction, the boys had labored to achieve an apparatus for both sending and receiving. When one spoke, the vocal impact against a sensitive diaphragm closed reception, but the minute the voice of the speaker ceased, the instrument again was ready to receive.

It was over this apparatus that the boys planned to broadcast a concert for the benefit and mystification of the Kikuyus, and now that his evening bulletins had been radioed to his father Jack got busy with final preparations. Moving their small talking machine into position and attaching the audion, he laid the records he and Frank had dust-

ed within reach for quick adjustment. All was now ready, and the only thing he waited for was Matse's report from a reconnaissance into the village that their loud speaker and apparatus concealed in the council tree had neither been discovered nor tampered with.

The council tree arrangement which had been installed the previous night at a late hour, when all in the village were asleep, consisted of one of the portable receiving sets with loop aerial and loud speaker attachment.

Really, the loop aerial had not been necessary. An insulated wire thrown over the topmost branches of the tree would have been sufficient. Installation of the small loop aerial had been considered by Bob as a "piece of dog." But Frank and Jack had insisted upon it, in the desire to make their proposed concert a superlative success. And they considered the clearness of the voice from the air during Wimba's trial ample justification of the extra trouble to which they had gone.

Frank returned as Jack finished his preparations, with the announcement that Matse reported the entire village assembled expectantly beneath the council tree about a great fire.

"So far as he could see or learn nobody has been into the council tree," Frank added. "And I guess

that's correct. These Kikuyus wouldn't go into that tree now, after what happened today, under any circumstances. So your fears are groundless, Bob. Well, let's go, Jack."

Jack arose and Bob with a humorous groan made his way to his comrade's place at the radio apparatus.

Because it was bad for his health to be abroad in the night air, he had been elected to act as operative.

"You fellows have all the best of it," he said.

Frank and Jack grinned sympathetically, then set out for the village center. They wanted to be on hand to see how Chief Ruku-Ru and his people took the concert.

Beside them trailed Wimba, who henceforth was to constitute himself Frank's faithful shadow, while ahead went the chattering bearers with the exception of four left behind as guards over the encampment.

Frank looked back once over his shoulder. "I suppose Bob will be all right," he said. "Only I don't quite like the idea of leaving him alone."

"Oh, come on," said Jack. "To be sure he'll be all right."

CHAPTER V.

THE KIKUYUS DANCE

So mystified were Chief Ruku-Ru and the Kikuyus by the concert that it was apparent the presence of the portable radio set with loud speaker in the uppermost branches of the spreading council tree was totally unsuspected. And all lingering doubts as to whether any of the Kikuyus had ventured into the tree and discovered the apparatus were swept from the minds of Frank and Jack.

For both it was a weird experience. Under the silver radiance of the African moon, now at the full, the square was bright. Any lingering shadows not dispelled by that flood of moonlight, disappeared, vanquished before the dancing gleams of a great fire. For the night here on the uplands was cool and the savages had built a roaring fire which crackled and leaped in the center of the square. To one side sat Chief Ruku-Ru in his armchair throne, surrounded by his bodyguard of tall warriors with spears erect, while in a semi-circle about

the fire and facing the council tree squatted row upon row of natives. And beyond them on every hand shown the conical roofs of the big huts.

At first alarmed at the music, the natives soon got over their fears and in no time at all, as Jack called to Frank's attention, they were swaying to the strains. Jack decided to take advantage of this tendency on the part of the rhythm-loving blacks. On leaving their encampment, he and Frank had noted on a slip of paper the names of the records Bob intended to play and their order. Between each two records Bob was to permit the lapse of a couple of minutes, in order that his comrades might be able to announce to Chief Ruku-Ru and the Kikuyus what the next number would be. In this way, they could add to their reputation as wizards, for wizards the Kikuyus believed them to be.

"The next number is going to be one of those Hawaiian things," he whispered to Frank, as the strains of a familiar Sousa march drew near their conclusion. "Let's announce to Chief Ruku-Ru that we are about to summon out of the air a piece of music for the especial benefit of the wonderful Kikuyu dancers of whom we have heard so much."

"Good idea," Frank nodded. "That Hawaiian umty-tum will be just about their speed."

Jack whispered to Wimba and, upon conclusion

of the march, the latter arose in the scheduled interval before the next number was to be broadcasted, and made Jack's announcement. That it met with friendly reception was apparent to the two boys by the stir of interest which went through the crowd.

"Who do you think will dance?" whispered Frank.

"I don't know," said Jack. "Perhaps everybody."

The music began and at the first strains of the wailing syncopated air with its suggestion of beaten tom-toms, of jungles and of tropic nights, the Kikuyus uttered low cries of approval. From their place near Chief Ruku-Ru the boys looking out over that assemblage saw that now, indeed, they had won the hearts of the savages.

Suddenly, from amidst the ranks of the natives squatting on their heels, the lithe slim figure of a young Kikuyu warrior sprang into the wide space about the fire.

Firelight falling upon him illumined the gleaming muscles of his body, naked except for breech clout. He stood a moment, still, rigid as a statue, then began to turn slowly about as if on a pivot.

"A black Apollo," whispered Jack.

The music swelled, the note of savagery became

more insistent. It was as if the invisible orchestra were playing for this particular audience, as if into the players had crept the very spirit of this night in a remote corner of central Africa. Jack and Frank both felt a strange stirring within them as if a response to the music, to the occasion. But what they experienced in their cultivated minds was but a trifle, the merest breath, compared to the effect of the music upon the savage, uncivilized minds of the blacks about them.

Wimba and Matse began to sway with the rest. A glassy look came into their eyes.

But they were strangers in this community. They did not dare to get to their feet.

Not so the young men of the Kikuyus. As the black Apollo ceased pivotting and began to circle the fire with arms rigid against his sides, body swaying, knees lifting high like those of a horse on parade, other young warrors leaped from the audience into the cleared space about the fire. Falling into line behind the leader, they circled in a dance at first rather stately but soon becoming madder and madder in movement until, upon the concluding strains of the record, they were flashing by the boys in a whirling, swirling mass of legs and gleaming ebon bodies.

"Wow," said Frank, expelling a long breath as,

following the subsidence of the music, the dancers ceased and melted back into the audience. "That was some sight. What a shame Niellsen wasn't here to take a movie of that?"

"Certainly is a shame," agreed Jack. "Can't you just see the audience in some movie palace back home, sitting there in the dark, when suddenly this moonlit village square with its fire and its circle of blacks flashes on the screen? Then the dancers begin! Can't you just see it? Oh, boy."

The Hawaiian records had been the last number of the programme. At Jack's prompting, Wimba bowing low to Chief Ruku-Ru made this announcement. In reply, the chief spoke at such length that the boys, unable to understand a word of what was said, became impatient. Then Wimba turned to them, his eyes big.

"Chief Ruku-Ru, him say tomolla him Kikuyus give warrior dance for um baas," interpreted Wimba. "Him say white wizards give um good time tonight, him give white wizards good time tomolla. Warrior dance when sun come up."

Jack let out a low whistle. "Tell Chief Ruku-Ru we are very much pleased," said Jack, "and we'll be there."

Wimba started to speak, but Frank with an exclamation checked him.

"Ask him, too, Wimba, whether we can take pictures of the dance," he commanded. "He may be scared of it, because we haven't taken any movies here as yet, and he hasn't become familiar with it."

"He saw a music box once," interpolated Jack. "And now he thinks every box with a handle to be turned ought to produce music."

Frank grinned. Then, realizing that they had not yet thanked Chief Ruku-Ru for his invitation to witness the warrior dance and military tactics, he turned to the interpreter and ordered him to speak up. A man of superior parts, Wimba could be trusted to couch acceptance in the floweriest of diplomatic language.

The main body of Kikuyus were melting away into the moonlit darkness, doubtless discussing at a great rate the marvellous music played by the spirits of the air at the bidding of the young white wizards. The sound of laughter and high voices came muffled out of the darkness. As for Chief Ruku-Ru, he sat watching the boys, still surrounded by his bodyguard of tall black warriors, awaiting a reply.

Wimba spoke at length, the chief listening attentively. And when upon the interpreter's conclusion, he replied, the boys saw by the relieved expression on Wimba's features, even before he interpreted

for their benefit, that the chief had given the required permission for the boys to photograph the warrior dance.

Such, indeed, proved to be the case. And, when diplomatic exchanges at last having been brought to a conclusion, the boys made their way back to their encampment followed by Wimba, Matse and the bearers, they were both jubilant and excited.

Contrary to Frank's earlier formless fears regarding possible danger to Bob through his being left alone, nothing untoward had occurred during their absence. In fact, the big fellow was feeling better than for days, the medicine left for him by Mr. Hampton having routed the fever. By the morrow, he believed he would be back to normal. And this was a satisfaction, as it would enable him to witness the military tactics and warrior dance.

"Set that alarm clock for an hour before sun-up," said Frank to Jack who, as the lightest sleeper, always took charge of waking everybody.

"All right," said Jack. "But Wimba will see to getting us up, never fear. That fellow has the faculty of waking at any hour he decides upon. It's a habit which all natives possess, he tells me."

"It's a good thing Niellsen gave us some lessons in the operation of a motion picture camera," said Frank. "I wouldn't have dared to try to take that

picture stuff in front of the council tree by moonlight, because I don't know enough about the game and would just have ruined a couple of hundred precious feet of film. But at this daylight stuff tomorrow, I expect we'll be all right."

With this the others agreed. The photographic equipment brought in by the expedition consisted of four film cameras, three Graflex hand cameras for obtaining "stills," many film packs for the latter, and eighty thousand feet of film for the former.

At Nairobi was a motor truck outfitted as dark room and developing plant. Originally, it had been Mr. Hampton's intention to take this motor truck with them on their wanderings, but so rough had proved to be some of the country negotiated on the first trip out from the settlement, that it had been decided to leave the plant thereafter at Nairobi so long as the party remained in the Kikuyu country.

Before the boys retired to sleep, there came a low call from outside and then Wimba parted the tent flap and looked in.

"Him funny bizness here, baas," said he, as Jack advanced to meet him. "Wimba and Matse take um down."

With that, he lifted the tent flap and thrust within the loud speaker, loop aerial and portable radio set

which several nights before, under the direction of Frank and Jack, he had installed in the council tree.

"By George, I forgot all about that," said Jack, taking the articles one by one as Wimba passed them into the tent.

"You're a good scout, Wimba," said Frank approvingly. "I forgot, too."

Wimba shrugged and ducked. "No good let um b'long council tree too long," he said. "Mebbe Chief send um man up pretty soon to have look—see."

"He's right, fellows," growled Bob from his cot. "These people are curious as monkeys, and after the novelty wore off they'd be sure to investigate."

"Well," said Jack, as Wimba dropped the flap behind him and departed, "thanks to Wimba, when Chief Ruku-Ru goes to investigate now he'll not find anything. And certainly the old radio saved Wimba's life and pulled us out of a bad hole."

"Besides really being responsible for getting us a chance to see the Chief's army at drill tomorrow," said Frank sleepily. "Well, fade out, will you? I'm dog tired."

Presently all three were sunk in slumber—a sleep tinged with pleasant thoughts of the novel sight in store for the morrow, but untouched by premonition of the perils to follow.

CHAPTER VI.

A SURPRISE ATTACK.

THE night passed without disturbance, and dawn found the boys with the ibiquitous Wimba clinging like a shadow at Frank's heels, stationed on a rise of ground west of the village.

The ground here rolled away in an open treeless plain filled with grass of vivid hue to where a half mile distant a line of trees marked the beginning of a forest. It was rolling country, rich green pasture uplands with clumps of forest here and there, and all rising in the background to a line of low hills that stretched away as far as the eye could see.

A never-ending source of surprise to the boys was the striking similarity of this country to the choicest New York State or New England landscapes. Evidences of civilized occupation such as farmhouses nestling amidst the greenery, the twin steel ribbons of railway, or stone fences or hedges, of course, were lacking. And the colors were more

vivid, under the brilliant sunshine and seen through air untainted by the smoke of cities, than at home. The greens were greener, and the purples and greys of distance were deeper. Nevertheless, with cultivated fields and herds of cattle in the distant meadows, the similarity to scenes of home was so striking that on this particular morning Jack, at least, experienced a pang of homesickness.

This feeling was soon dispelled, however, for an exclamation from Frank, echoed by Bob who ventured forth for the first time in days, recalled Jack to the present. Following the indication of Frank's pointing finger, he saw the distant forest suddenly spout warriors.

"By George, what a sight," he cried as, the long slanting rays of the newly-risen sun full upon them, the warriors advanced, five hundred strong, spread out in open order, with the beautifully decorated hide shields carried by the front rank gleaming in the sunlight.

Frank already was turning the crank of the motion picture camera, while Chief Ruku-Ru, separated for once from his arm chair, stood to one side watching him with absorbed interest. The advance of his drilling warriors meant nothing to the dusky monarch, for it was something with which he was familiar. This strange machine, into which the

young white wizard peered, while slowly turning a crank, was, on the other hand, a mystery.

So engaged in watching Frank was the chief that he did not at once note the panting messenger who came tearing up to the royal party from the direction of the village in the rear.

Then, as his eye fell on the boy, for such he was, the chief spoke a few words to him sharply. The youth replied between gasps, more at length.

Watching the advancing warriors, who now had come to a halt in the middle of the plain, where they knelt and took cover behind their shields, only their round black heads and long lances showing above, the boys paid no attention to this by-play.

Not so Wimba, however, for as the messenger poured out his tale, he clutched Jack by an arm and, having obtained his attention, repeated hastily what was being said.

"Him bad tribe raid village," he said. "Carry off cattle and women. Boy escape and make tell Chief Ruku-Ru."

"What! Great Scott!"

"What's that? What's that?" cried Bob, excitedly. "Say, Jack, if raiders cleaned out the village, maybe they went after our camp, too."

Frank, unhearing, continued to crank his camera.

But Jack was dismayed. Bob's words had aroused his own fears. Much of their paraphernalia was at the camp. Other cameras, thousands of feet of film, both taken and unused, clothing, gifts for various chiefs yet to be encountered, rifles and ammunition. These latter had been left behind, and the boys wore only their automatics. Above all, their radio apparatus had been left in camp. Clumsy handling might destroy it irreparably.

"Find out all you can, Wimba," he commanded sharply. "Did the raiders go near our camp?"

"Maybe, they missed it," he added hopefully to Bob. "You see we lie to one side and out of sight of the village."

Wimba was rapidly interrogating the chief who, with a word or two, dismissed him, then turned to face the plain and using his arms as a semaphore went through a set of gestures which quite obviously were some kind of signal.

That they were so understood by the warriors was apparent, for the latter leaped forward in a tearing run that ate up the distance.

In the meantime, Frank, all unaware as yet of what was going forward, cranked away for dear life, delighted with the marvellous picture he was obtaining, while the others questioned Wimba as to the chief's reply.

"Him say no know," replied Wimba. "Raid come from other side. Mebbe your camp, baas, not found."

"Anyhow, we left a half dozen bearers with guns on guard," said Bob. "They'd be able to stand off these savages armed only with bows and arrows."

"Yes, if they didn't get scared and run," said Jack. "Look at those fellows come. They'll be here in a minute. What's the chief going to do?"

Frank for the first time withdrew his head from the camera hood.

"Say, you chaps," he cried delightedly. "You ought to see this. It'll make one gerat picture."

He was about to place his eyes again to the machine and resume grinding, but Bob gripped him by an arm, and in a few words apprised him of what was up.

To within twenty-feet of the chief, who had advanced several paces in front of the boys, charged his warriors at a furious rate. Then they suddenly halted, the whole mass, as if turned to stone. Execution of the maneuvre in such dramatic fashion left the watching boys breathless. For a moment they forgot their own worries in admiration of the Kikuyus, and Frank mourned loudly because Bob had restrained him from resuming camera operations in time to get that last picture.

The black warriors gazed expectantly at their chief, and the latter addressed them in a loud voice. When he had ceased, angry cries went up, and then, like a wave splitting on a rock, the warriors without more ado, parted into two divisions and, flowing on either side of the chief and the dumbfounded boys, charged over the hill toward the village.

"Come on, fellows, here's a chance to see some action. Maybe, to take a hand in it," cried Bob, starting in pursuit.

Chief Ruku-Ru had placed himself at the head of his men and departed on the run before the boys could so much as ask his intentions. The blacks were still flowing along, on either side of the boys.

"But my camera," wailed Frank, who was a great movie fan. "I can't tote all this stuff myself. And I don't want to leave it behind. Think of the chance to get a real battle picture."

"I'll take the dratted thing," said Bob. And sweeping the legs of the tripod together, he gathered up tripod and camera, and started away, automatic already out and gripped in his free hand.

Jack picked up one reel case and Frank another, and, with Wimba and Matse clinging to their heels, away they went in pursuit of the running warriors.

CHAPTER VII.

BOB MEETS THE BONE CRUSHER.

CLOSER to civilization than most native tribes, by reason of the British development of Kenya Colony, yet the Kikuyus still cling to primitive customs. In nothing is this more apparent than in their methods of warfare and in the instruments employed.

Instead of paying many head of cattle to rascally traders for the trade guns smuggled to many tribes, they continue to use bows and arrows and spears, both for making war and for hunting.

So now as the boys galloped along at the tail end of the charging warriors of Chief Ruku-Ru, automatics in hand, they realized that if it came to close quarters with the enemy they would be of material assistance to their hosts by reason of the superiority of their weapons. For the enemy were Kikuyus, too, although of another clan, this big race being scattered in thirteen loosely-organized clans over a wide territory. And the raiders would be no differently armed than their hosts.

Down the hill, through a cover of woods, and into the village dashed Chief Ruku-Ru and his warriors, the boys at the rear but holding their own.

Loud cries from the foremost sounded warning that the enemy was still on the ground. At once the blacks ahead of them leaped to take cover behind the nearest huts, and began creeping forward from hut to hut, crouching and running close to the ground in covering open spaces.

The boys were not slow to follow this example, the wisdom of which became apparent when arrows began whizzing overhead, burying themselves in the thatched roofs of the huts or smacking with a dull thudding sound against the mud walls

Sticking closely together, the three boys with Wimba, Matse and a number of bearers at their heels, took shelter behind one of the largest huts of the village as the rain of arrows increased.

So loud and close at hand now were the shouts that it was clear the enemy had been surprised by Chief Ruku-Ru before they could run away with their prisoners and loot. From the sounds, the hottest part of the fighting was not far away. In fact, Bob, who had leaned the tripod and film camera against the mud wall of the hut behind which they were momentarily sheltered, and had advanced to the nearest corner past which swept a perfect storm

of arrows, returned with the report that in his opinion the main fight was being waged on the other side of the hut.

"And no wonder," said Jack "Don't you fellows recognize this hut? Well, I can't blame you, for you're seeing it for the first time from the rear. But this is Chief Ruku-Ru's palace, I'm sure. Look. You can see the tip of a tree on the other side from here. There's only one tree large enough to be seen like that, and that's the council tree. Yes sir, fellows, this is the Chief's palace."

"Probably surprised the raiders looting it," asserted Frank.

"May be so," said Bob. "The chief has forty wives, you know. And these raiders undoubtedly came to carry the women away as captives. Women do the work amongst the Kikuyus, and they're pretty valuable critters."

"Listen to that," interrupted Jack, as louder shouts gave warning of more intense fighting. "And, by George," he added, in high excitement, clutching Bob by an arm, "look there. Those are some of Chief Ruku-Ru's men, aren't they?"

He pointed to several figures, crossing the open space by the side of the "palace," speeding back toward the rear.

"Running away," said Bob. "They're getting the worst of it."

He stepped back, gazing upward.

"I can do it," he cried. "Give me a hand, Jack. Cup your hands for a leg up."

"Do what?"

"Scale that wall," cried Bob. "Mud wall's about eight feet high. We can swarm over it, drop into the chief's courtyard, and then from behind the wall on the other side we can attack the enemy in the rear. Come on."

"Right," said Jack, putting his back against the wall and cupping his hands.

Without more words, Bob set a foot therein and springing gripped the top of the wall and pulled himself up. Then, facing about, he lay down, with his arms hanging. And Jack, leaping upward, seized his wrists and was pulled to position beside him.

"All right, Frank," cried Bob.

"Take this camera first," Frank answered. "If you fellows are going to take potshots at the enemy from the chief's domicile, I want some pictures of it."

"Hurry, then," cried Bob, impatiently. And Frank obediently hoisted aloft the camera on its long tripod, which was seized and whisked to posi-

tion over the wall. Frank was boosted up by Wimba and hauled to position beside his comrades.

"Me come, too, baas," pleaded the faithful fellow.

So Wimba, although without firearms to render him a useful ally, likewise was hoisted to the wall.

Then all four leaped down into the courtyard, where ordinarily Chief Ruku-Ru stabled his milch cows. But now the courtyard, deep in dung, was deserted. The raiders already had driven off the animals.

In one corner of the spacious yard lay two guards outstretched in the sun. The boys shivered.

"Killed," said Bob, gritting his teeth. "Well, these rascals need a lesson. Come on."

Yells from the other side of the opposite mud wall apprised them their surmise was correct. The fight was raging there, and with uncommon fierceness. But Chief Ruku-Ru's forces were getting the worst of it. The raiders were too many for them.

Bob leaped to the low roof of a cow shed built against the wall, which overtopped it by two or three feet. Crouching behind this bulwark, he peered out. He found he faced the great village square. The two forces were fighting at close quarters. The air was filled with arrows. Here and there lay fallen warriors, never to move again, while

others were dragging themselves away with ghastly wounds upon them.

It was easy to distinguish between the two forces. Easy for one thing, if for no other. Not because of the fact that one side had herded cattle and wailing women indiscriminately into one corner of the square at its back. That betokened the enemy host, right enough. But a clearer indication was afforded by the two leaders.

Chief Ruku-Ru, strongly built, a ferocious fighter, had thrown aside shield, spear, bow, and armed only with a wicked knife was engaged in hand to hand combat with a gigantic negro similarly accoutred who wore in addition a tuft of golden eagle feathers in his hair.

These were the respective chieftains, and their fighting men stood back to permit them free play. In fact, in the vicinity of the two warriors, all other fighting had died away.

The boys were unaware that Chief Ruku-Ru's opponent was known as the Bone Crusher, and that his fame as a terrible fighter was widespread amongst all the Kikuyu clans. But that this individual combat had dwarfed all others for the moment was apparent. Not only those warriors in their vicinity had ceased fighting, as if by common consent, but over the whole square in a trice

spread a truce that reached to the farthest combatants. The shouts of the fighters, the wails of the captive women, died away. Only the panting of the two gladiators could be heard.

Jack and Frank had clambered into position beside Bob, with Wimba close at Frank's heels. Frank, moreover, as soon as he saw what was going on had set up the camera and already was busy grinding away as if with no thought except to obtain a motion picture of that contest.

"Like something out of the old tales of Homer," whispered Jack.

Bob nodded, half absently. He was too busy watching that strange contest to waste time drawing comparisons with the past. Biggest of the boys, a youth of gigantic frame although still only in his teens, Bob was one of the cleverest amateur boxers and wrestlers in America. Moreover, although not exactly pugnacious of spirit, yet he did frankly and openly, as he was wont to express it, "love a good fight."

And a good fight he was beholding now.

Crouching, wicked knives clasped in their right hands, left arms advanced with the long cotton garments betokening their chiefhood ripped from their shoulders and wrapped about the forearm as guard, the two warriors circled each other, looking for an

opening. What Chief Ruku-Ru lacked in height and weight by comparison with his huger opponent, he made up in superior speed and litheness. The pliant muscles of his back and thighs could be seen writhing beneath the ebon skin of his naked body as he leaped this way and that.

That his blows did not all miss soon became apparent as first one and then another long rip gushing crimson appeared on the black skin of the Bone Crusher. The latter, on the other hand, try as he would, could not get past Chief Ruku-Ru's guard. His knife struck and struck again, but always as if by a miracle Chief Ruku-Ru's padded forearm fended off the blow at the last second of time.

Suddenly, the Bone Crusher, rendered desperate by his foe's superiority with the knife, goaded into insensate fury by the repeated slashing to which he was subjected, tossed his knife high into the air and with a vast bellow leaped upon Chief Ruku-Ru. But he was canny, this Bone Crusher, and even as he sprang he flung the flowing cotton garment hanging from his left arm over the other's head.

Thus confused and blinded, Chief Ruku-Ru lashed out wildly with his knife, but without being able to see to direct his blows.

Wrapping his long arms about the other's waist, the Bone Crusher whirled him aloft and sent him

spinning like a giant top into the midst of Chief Ruku-Ru palsied followers.

But he was not left long to enjoy his victory. Before his forces could renew the combat, before the stricken followers of Chief Ruku-Ru could turn and flee, a new assailant appeared.

He was none other than Bob. Leaping down from the mud wall before Jack and Frank could move to restrain him, big Bob launched himself like a thunderbolt at the Bone Crusher.

A shout of warning from his henchmen at his back caused the gigantic black to face about. But before he could put up any defense, Bob shot forward as if for a low football tackle. Many a time on the field he had swooped in just such irresistible fashion at the legs of an opposing player. But this time his intention was not merely to bring his man down.

His hands closed about the ankles of the Bone Crusher, and then he straightened up with startling swiftness. And for all his bulk, the Bone Crusher went hurtling through the air, over Bob's shoulders, to fall, not amongst his own followers, but into the ranks of the enemy.

Had he fallen on his head, his neck might have snapped. For never had Bob put into that particular hold the viciousness he had employed now.

But in falling the Bone Crusher brushed against a warrior. His course was deflected. And instead of alighting on his head and shoulders, he fell on his side.

With a catlike agility not to be expected in a man so huge, he bounded up from the earth with an ear-splitting roar of rage, and ran foaming at the mouth toward Bob. Just what he intended will never be known.

Bob saw him coming and set himself. As the Bone Crusher lunged forward, Bob sidestepped and launched a triphammer blow with his right fist. It caught the Bone Crusher behind the point of the jaw with a thud that sounded like a dull explosion, and the huge Negro chieftain collapsed as if a mountain had fallen upon him. His great body jerked once or twice then lay still.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TIDE TURNS.

THE tide was turned. The next moment, as Bob, flushed with victory, prepared to leap in amongst the wavering mass of the Bone Crusher's followers, Jack and Frank appeared at his side. Too well they knew the big fellow's rashness when his blood was up to hold back any longer. Not that they had been holding back, however. So quickly had Bob acted that the passage of time since he had leaped down from the top of the wall and made his sudden attack on the Bone Crusher could be measured in seconds.

Jack and Frank had followed at once, Wimba at Frank's heels like a faithful dog. Now they ranged themselves beside their comrade.

"Steady, old thing," warned Jack, as Bob with a wild gleam in his eyes appeared on the verge of tackling the enemy host single-handed. "Let's stick together. You've thrown an awful scare into them."

In fact, the Bone Crusher's men showed little

stomach for fighting. That is, for facing Bob. The mute evidence of the latter's prowess was at his back, where the prone figure of the Bone Crusher lay without a quiver, since that blow on the point of the jaw.

But the lull in hostilities did not last. Chief Ruku-Ru's men were heartened by the turn of events in their favor. They crowded forward with sharp yells. The flight of arrows into the mass of the enemy began anew.

"I haven't the heart to shoot to kill," muttered Frank. "But if they realize we have firearms, they may flee more quickly. I'm going to shoot over their heads."

He suited action to word, and began pumping away with his automatic. It was the last thing needed to hasten the growing panic. In a trice, conditions were reversed. The Bone Crusher's men broke into headlong flight, dashing away pell mell amongst the huts on the opposite side of the village square. And the villagers streamed past the boys in pursuit.

They found themselves practically alone in the square. Pursuit drew away into the distance. The victorious vengeful cries of the villagers mingling with the screams of the vanquished came back to them. Dazedly, they gazed about at the numerous

evidences of the battle just ended, in the cowering women abandoned by their captors and not yet fully realizing their fortunate rescue, in the bodies of a score of men, including that of Chief Ruku-Ru and the Bone Crusher, and in arrows scattered here and there.

"By golly, Bob," said Frank, whose face was pale, as he thought of the peril into which his big chum had launched himself, "I've seen you do a lot of foolish things, but that was the worst. To tackle that giant."

"Huh," was all the other deigned to reply.

Jack was bending above the form of Chief Ruku-Ru, and a moment later he straightened up and beckoned the others to join him.

"Unconscious but beginning to mutter," he said. "He'll recover soon. I think his right shoulder is dislocated, but I don't believe he has any serious injury. Let's carry him to his hut, and I'll try to set his shoulder."

With Wimba's aid, the four boys bore the body of the chief to the door of his hut, from which one of the chief's wives who hastened to join them brought out a pallet. On this they laid the unconscious form, while Jack worked at setting the dislocated shoulder. In this he was successful as, like all the boys, he was well drilled in administering

first aid and performing rude surgery such as mishaps in the wilds necessitated.

Wimba and Matse rounded up the scattered bearers, and several were despatched to the boys' camp to obtain the medical kit. They returned quickly, bringing the welcome intelligence that the camp had not been disturbed by the raiders who, approaching the village from an opposite direction, doubtless were unaware of its presence.

Thereupon, all three boys busied themselves administering to the wounded, a score of whom were collected. Women were pressed into service, as all the able-bodied men had joined in the pursuit of the routed enemy. Not until many hours of toil under the hot sun had been spent, however, was their self-imposed task of mercy completed. Then all the wounded had been attended to and made as comfortable as possible in the biggest hut of the chief's enclosure, which had been commandeered as hospital.

It was nightfall, and most of the warriors had returned, under the leadership of Chief Ruku-Ru's nephew, when the chief who had recovered consciousness and, in fact, was little the worse as a result of his encounter with the Bone Crusher, was informed that the boys had attended to all the injured.

He met them in the village square, where already a great fire was blazing and preparations for a big feast in celebration of the tribe's victory were going forward. Wimba as usual acted as interpreter. And into his eyes came a gleam which warned the boys something unusual was afoot, before he ever interpreted the chief's lengthy speech.

Lengthy though the chief's speech had been, however, it was brief enough on Wimba's lips. He was not so proficient in his command of English as to be able to render all the chief's verbal flowers, and contented himself accordingly with reporting the gist of what the dusky monarch had said. Chief Ruku-Ru, one arm in a sling, in the meantime stood smiling at one side.

"Him much honor, baas," said Wimba, addressing Frank whom, since the latter's rescue of himself from death by means of the radio, he regarded as the leader of the boys. "Him chief say him take all three white young men into tribe and make Strong Arm,"—indicating Bob, with a wave of the hand—"great chief."

That this was an honor, the boys knew enough of local history to realize. Many African tribes degenerate when coming into contact with white men, and for them to make such an offer would be insolent and presumptuous. But the Kikuyus, far above the

average of African intelligence, were a proud people. And the boys realized that, holding themselves in high esteem, the Kikuyus felt they were bestowing an honor.

In such a spirit, they accepted it.

"Tell Chief Ruku-Ru," said Frank to Wimba, after consulting with his comrades, "that we shall make only one stipulation. We are very flattered. So much so that we want Mr. Hampton here to see when the ceremonies take place. Tell the chief that we shall summon Mr. Hampton through the air tonight to return, and that probably he can be back in two days. The ceremonies can be held then."

Wimba translated this as best he could, and then interpreting the chief's reply stated matters would be arranged as requested.

Before permitting the boys to depart, however, Chief Ruku-Ru pressed a bracelet of heavy silver, oddly worked by native silversmiths, and containing a turquoise matrix, upon Bob.

They examined it in turn as they made their way back to the camp, and many were their expressions of appreciation. The fact that it bore a family resemblance to the silver and turquoise bracelets of the Navajo Indians of the American Southwest was commented upon by Jack.

"Curious," he said, "how the same sort of work-

manship, as well as the combination of silver and turquoise, can bob up among two primitive peoples who never heard of each other."

"Yes, it is," said Frank. "But what I'm thinking of is this big bum with a bracelet. Lady stuff."

Bob made a grab for him, and the pair began rolling over and over in the long buffalo grass.

"Ouch. Leggo," begged Frank, almost choked with laughter.

"Take it back."

"Sure," gasped Frank, and Bob arose. "Only thing that would be funnier," cried Frank, sprinting for their tent, "would be for you to wear a lady's wrist watch."

Watching his comrades, the soberer Jack smiled sympathetically. They had all been through a trying experience, and it was natural that their spirits should find relief in play.

Then he, too, entered the tent, after giving Wimba orders regarding the preparation of dinner, and began tuning up to call his father and not only make report regarding the momentous adventures of the day, but also ask him to return so as to be present at the ceremonies of induction into the Kikuyus.

CHAPTER IX.

AFRICAN KNIGHTHOOD.

At the end of two days Mr. Hampton and Niellsen, the photographer, a tall rangy Scandinavian some ten years older than the boys, returned. And when this intelligence was communicated to Chief Ruku-Ru he made preparations for the carrying out of the ceremonies in honor of the boys that very night.

Prior to going to the village, the two parties exchanged experiences. And while Mr. Hampton and Niellsen had had no such exciting times as the boys, yet they, too, had not been without adventure.

In particular, the boys laughed heartily over Niellsen's description of an incident attending the photographing of some baboons. It being the dry season, their guides had taken Mr. Hampton and Niellsen to a certain dry river bed in which water could be obtained by digging, a fact with which the baboons were well aware. Here, prophesied the guides, they would undoubtedly be able to obtain

excellent pictures of baboons. And in this prophecy they had been correct.

"But," laughed Mr. Hampton, "you should have seen what happened to Niellsen. Tell it, Oscar."

Niellsen joined the older man in the laugh. He had an honest open face with a tip-tilted nose and sandy recalcitrant hair which gave him a humorous appearance calculated to induce smiles in his auditors before ever he spoke. And in keeping with his appearance he had a habit of dry speech which the boys found highly amusing.

"The joke was on me, all right," he said.

"Or the baboon was," said Mr. Hampton, laughing harder than ever, as if at some diverting recollection.

At this Jack could no longer conceal his impatience. "Come on, tell it," he said. "Don't keep this all to yourselves."

"Well, it was this way," said Niellsen. "You know if I'd have shown myself to the baboons with my camera, I'd never have gotten them to stand still long enough to have their pictures taken. Instead of watching the birdie, they'd have come up and tried to operate the machine. So I decided to hide myself. And for my place of concealment, I chose the branches of a small uprooted tree.

"There I was, had been waiting about half an

hour, when the baboons arrived. They began digging in the sand like regular ditch diggers. How they did make the dirt fly. There were baboons everywhere, scores of them. The whole tribe must have eaten pretzels and then hustled off to this spot in the river with a whale of a thirst to be squenched.

"I was fooling around, trying to get a good focus, for the light was tricky. And at last I had just what I wanted, and set my hand to the crank, all ready to begin grinding.

"At that moment, something lighted on my head with such force that I fell clean out of my perch. But fortunately the ground wasn't far away, a matter of three or four feet.

"I didn't know what had struck me. But when I got to my feet and looked around, there sat a baboon in my old perch. And he was cranking away, just grinding for dear life, and chattering with delight.

"The beggar had jumped on my head, and then had taken my job away from me."

The boys roared.

"What did you do?" asked Frank.

"Do? I bows to him and says, 'Please, Mr. Baboon, won't you go away?' And after giving me a line of baboon talk that I couldn't understand,

because I didn't have my dictionary with me, he swung away to join his friends."

"But the camera?" asked Jack. "Had the baboon damaged it?"

"Not a bit of it," averred Niellsen. "I found the focus still good, and continued to grind out some more film. And I believe the beggar took some good stuff while he was at the crank. If it comes out all right in developing, I'm going to have stuff worth a fortune. 'Baboons photographed by one of their number.' Can't you just see that caption on the screen?"

"Yes," said Mr. Hampton, "and I was fortunate enough to obtain a picture of the baboon turning the crank, for I was standing nearby with my camera when it occurred. So you see we could show an actual 'still' of the baboon playing photographer."

Dinner was hastily consumed, and then the whole party escorted by a guard of honor from the chief's own bodyguard, comprising the tallest and best formed of the young warriors, proceeded to the village.

Under the council tree in his battered arm chair sat Chief Ruku-Ru, and near him the boys took their station. A great fire blazing in the middle of the square threw off a dancing light which illumined the mud walls of the nearest huts, showed rank on

rank of dusky bodies gathered in the square and, falling upon the spears of the chief's bodyguard at his back, struck from their brightly polished heads a myriad gleams as if fireflies flitted in the dusk.

A hush hung over the scene, a solemnity that impressed itself on the boys. And as they took their places at the chief's right, surrounded by their warrior escort, they spoke only in whispers.

"What's that package under your arm, Bob?" asked Jack, for the first time noting a bulky package borne by his comrade. "Is it——"

But he did not get to finish his question, for Mr. Hampton laying a warning hand on his arm enjoined silence as Chief Ruku-Ru, rising from his chair and advancing several steps in their direction, began to address them.

He spoke at length, the sound of his voice alone being heard in the great square. And when he had finished, Wimba translated hurriedly.

Chief Ruku-Ru, said he, was deeply grateful to the young white men for the part they had played in routing the Bone Crusher's warriors. For this, all three were to be admitted to warriorhood in the clan.

"It's just as if you fellows were young squires in some old mediaeval kingdom," whispered Mr. Hampton. "And the king was about to lay the ac-

colade on your shoulders and acclaim you knights."

Moreover, continued Wimba, while Chief Ruku-Ru stood silent, with folded arms, awaiting the interpreter's conclusion, Bob was to be especially honored. He had overcome the Bone Crusher, and had proved himself the mightiest of all Kikuyu warriors. He was to be given the title of Mikalwa which meant Strong-Arm and the honorary rank of war chief of the clan.

As the import of Wimba's words dawned upon him, big Bob could be seen by a close observer to pale slightly. And Frank was a close observer.

"Hold your ground, old boy," he whispered. "They're not going to eat you. Don't let War Chief Mikalwa show fright now."

Three tall warriors now advanced at the chief's signal from the bodyguard at his back. Each carried a conical cap of rhinoceros hide, with a gleaming white rhinoceros tusk, upcurving like a sickle, attached to each side. These caps were placed on the heads of the boys.

So impressive was this ceremony, there in the African night, in the heart of an African village, with the gleaming firelight flashing on spearheads and on the multitude of assembled blacks in the background, that for once the boys did not feel like giving way to the spirit of fun-making. Not a

whisper passed between them. Their faces were solemn.

As for Niellsen, stationed at his camera equipped with a lens for night photography, he was grinding merrily away, assured that the film he was obtaining would be without a parallel.

After the caps with their rhino tusks had been placed on the boys' heads, the three warriors retired, giving way to three more. These latter placed long spears in the boys' hands, in turn giving way to still another trio who equipped them with beautifully decorated hide shields.

Once more Chief Ruku-Ru spoke, but this time to his people, and his words were followed by a burst of approving cries that seemed to shake the very leaves of the council tree drooping in the windless night overhead. Wimba translating said the chief had announced to his people that the boys now were Kikuyu warriors, and that Bob should henceforth be Mikalwa or Strong-Arm.

"You will have to thank him, fellows," said Mr. Hampton. "And I guess, Bob, since he singled you out, it is up to you to act as spokesman."

Bob groaned; nevertheless he advanced a step or two in front of his friends and, addressing the chief, thanked him for the honor conferred upon himself and his comrades. This Wimba translated. Then

Bob tore the paper wrappings from the parcel which he had been carying under his arm, and Jack with a start recognized it as one of their portable radio sets.

"Tell Chief Ruku-Ru," said Bob, to Wimba, "that in return for his kindness to us, we wish to make him a present. By means of this, he can hear strange music and speech tonight and so long as we are in his vicinity."

When Wimba had translated, Bob advanced and asked Chief Ruku-Ru to seat himself in his arm-chair-throne. Then he adjusted the headpiece to the chief's ears, threw a wire over the council tree, and tuned in to catch the music which Matse, who had been left behind at the camp for the purpose, was playing on the talking machine.

"You certainly won his heart that time, Bob," said Jack, admiringly, as Bob returned to the side of his comrades. "Look at his face, if you want to see real amazement."

The chief continually taking off and restoring the receivers, and all the time curiously eyeing the cabinet. It was as if he were trying to determine the origin of the strange sounds which he heard when the receivers were attached to his ears but which were reduced to the thinnest of whispers when he removed the headpiece.

"I wondered what that package under your arm contained," added Jack.

"Well, you see, I thought we owed the old boy something in return for what he was doing for us," said Bob. "So I decided to give him a real present. I fixed up with Matse to play the records. He's become a great radio fan, and when you fellows left me alone with him the other night—when you used the radio to free Wimba, you know—why, I showed him how to operate the set. He's as imitative as a monkey and as bright as a new penny. I listened in for a minute, before putting the headpiece on the chief's ears, and Matse had things going all right."

"Well, you might have let a fellow in on it," said Jack.

"Oh, you and Frank were too busy talking to your father," said Bob.

In the meantime, although Chief Ruku-Ru had retired from the center of the stage, so to speak, matters had not come to a standstill. Quite the contrary, in fact, for with the completion of the ceremonies having to do with the boys, the Kikuyus had gone about the business of celebration in earnest.

Numerous smaller fires sprang into being about the square, and some the feasting was in full swing. Always ready for merry-making, the Kikuyus had seized upon this occasion for a celebration despite

the fact that only two or three nights before another had been held.

However, as Mr. Hampton and the boys had no desire to participate in the drinking of the heavy native beer or to witness the orgy which was bound to follow as the natives came under the influence of liquor, they excused themselves to the chief on the ground that they found it necessary to retire in order to be prepared for breaking camp at an early hour on the morrow, and departed.

Wrapped up in his new toy, Chief Ruku-Ru made no objection, and so they managed to get away. Behind them already the dancing about the fires was growing wilder and more unrestrained.

"These Africans are just children, after all," said Mr. Hampton, shaking his head. "They don't know the meaning of the word restraint. Well, now for a good night's sleep, everybody. We start at dawn."

CHAPTER X.

ONE GOOD TURN.

CAMP was broken at the first faint streaks of dawn the next day. Mr. Hampton was eager to penetrate farther up-country in order to get into a big game region of which he had heard reports. And by the time day had fully broken, the column was on its way.

Looking back from the top of a little hill, the three boys could see the village of Chief Ruku-Ru, which they had skirted, still sleeping after its exciting night. Ahead, through the long buffalo grass, wound the bearers under the direction of Wimba and Matse, each man either carrying a bundle on his head or else supporting on his shoulders one end of a pole from which was slung one of the more bulky articles of equipment, while a companion upheld the other.

Then they dropped down on the other side of the rise, and the village was lost to view.

"I wonder if we'll ever pass that way again," mused Jack.

"If we do," said Frank, "there'll be an ebony chieftain looking for War Chief Mikalwa's scalp."

"What do you mean, looking for my scalp?" demanded Bob.

"Oh, nothing," said Frank, airily. "Only when Chief Ruku-Ru goes to put on his headpiece after we've left and thinks he's going to hear a concert, how do you think he'll regard you?"

Bob laughed. "Well he had a good time with it last night. And, besides, possession of that set will always mean something to him. It's white man's magic. And that alone will raise him in the esteem of his people."

After putting the village behind them, the party settled down to continuous travel, for the big game country for which Mr. Hampton was heading lay ten days travel to the northwest. The marches were made in the early morning and late afternoon. During the heat of the day, there was a halt of four hours, as travel would have been too arduous and, indeed, dangerous in the extreme under that blazing sun.

Hot though the days were, however, the nights were cool. And so the boys not only managed to hold out without falling ill, but even enjoyed the trip. Their irrepressible spirits, moreover, came to the fore. And on several occasions they played

practical jokes on each other which were the cause of much laughter on the part of Mr. Hampton and Niellsen.

One such occurred after they had been on the march more than a week and were encamped one night near the bank of a river on the edge of the big game country.

The day had been hot and breathless, but the night had turned cool. And after camp was pitched, the boys with Mr. Hampton and Niellsen were gathered about a camp fire not far from their tent. Niellsen who had taken motion pictures in many out-of-the-way corners of the world had been telling of some of his experience.

"And so," he concluded, "when I turned back my bed before jumping in that night, I found a puff-adder all curled up nicely there for a snooze. You fellows have often asked me why I always look into my bed before hopping in. Well, that's the reason."

"Brrr," shuddered Bob, "if there's anything I detest it's a snake. And puff-adders are the deadliest in the world, aren't they?"

"They are that," said Niellsen, emphatically.

"While that is true, though," added Mr. Hampton, "yet the deaths from snake bites are remarkably few in Africa. The natives have various antidotes. And many a man who has been bitten by one or

other of the various poisonous snakes of Africa, even by the puff-adder, has failed to die of his injury. However, I for one have no desire to be bitten. Well, let's turn in, fellows. We want to make an early start tomorrow and try and find some place where we can ford this river."

Then, noting with surprise the absence of Jack and Frank, whom he had failed to see slip away several minutes before, he asked what had become of them. But so quiet had been their departure that neither of the others had noted it.

"Maybe they've already turned in," said Niellsen, getting up and stretching.

All three set out for their tents, and a look into that shared by the three boys showed Jack and Frank already snuggled down in their "flea" bags.

Good nights were said, and then Mr. Hampton and Niellsen parting company with Bob went to their tent. So fatigued was the big fellow after an arduous day of marching that he was half-asleep while disrobing, and he tumbled into his sleeping bag unaware of the fact that his comrades watched his every movement alertly through slitted eyelids.

One long sigh he gave, the kind a fellow emits just before settling down to a good night's sleep. He squirmed once or twice, making himself comfortable. Then his eyes closed and he fall into that

half-waking, half-sleeping stage from which insensibly one drifts into profound slumber.

Suddenly his every nerve quivered. He was just on the point of drawing his body together and springing up, blankets and all, when he recalled the advice given him for just such an emergency and by an effort of will controlled his nerves so that he lay perfectly still and motionless. But what an effort was required! For big Bob felt something clammy and cold touch his leg, something alive, something that moved and wriggled and was gliding alsongside his body toward his head.

Undoubtedly, it was a snake. Into his mind leaped recollection of what had been said only a short time previously about the camp fire on the subject of snakes.

Niellsen had said puff-adders were the deadliest of snakes, and likewise that they preferred to coil themselves in a fellow's bedding. This must be a puff-adder, nothing less.

If a fellow exhibited no sign of life when in the vicinity of a snake, Mr. Hampton had earlier declared, the reptile might fail to become alarmed and might glide away without striking. It was his only chance. And big Bob, suffering agonies of mental torture, nevertheless exercised an iron self-control and lay without moving a muscle.

But not for long could he or anyone control himself under such conditions. Hot eyeballs glaring into the darkness began to see pinwheels and rockets. He felt as if his chest would burst. In another moment, he must let go, and leap up, no matter what the consequences.

All this time the clammy something had been creeping farther and farther up Bob's body. Now it came to his thigh, and then he could feel it on his abdomen. Bob couldn't stand the torture of passivity any longer. He was just on the verge of crying out in horror, when realization came to him with a jolt that the something, whatever it was, was crawling, not gliding, crawling on four legs. Therefore, it couldn't be a snake.

One bound shot Bob out of his blankets. He seized an electric torch which he always kept near at hand, and whirling about focussed its brilliant gleam upon his "flea" bag. There, in the middle of the blankets, blinking in the white glare, sat an insignificant little green frog.

Which felt the smaller—the surprised froglet or the chagrined Bob—it is difficult to say.

Suddenly a flash of realization came to him. He saw it all. Frank and Jack had slipped away and preceded him to the tent. Camp was near the river bank. It would have been easy enough to walk

along the edge of the stream with a flashlight, and by its glare surprise a frog and capture it. Easy enough, indeed; and, undoubtedly, that was what had been done. Then the two rascals had put the frog in his blankets.

Assured of this, Bob's first idea was to tumble his comrades out of bed at once and roughhouse them. He had been badly scared. In fact, his nerves still quivered. He considered they had gone a bit too far in the matter of practical joking. Then he decided against instant action.

That was just what they would be looking for. Undoubtedly, they were awake and watching his every movement, enjoying his discomfiture. If he started to tumble them about, they would join forces against him. The result would be a rough-and-tumble combat, endangering the safety of various articles of equipment scattered about the tent.

"I'll not give them any satisfaction," thought Bob. "I'll just turn in, and not say anything. They'll be worried as to what I mean to do. And when my chance comes——"

Switching off the flashlight, and tossing the frog aside, he crawled back into his blankets. Once he believed he heard a subdued chuckle, whether on the part of Frank or Jack he could not decide. But nothing was said to him.

As for the others, they felt foolish. Both experienced an uncomfortable sense that their practical joke had been too startling in character. Besides, old Bob had robbed them of their enjoyment by refusing to display resentment.

Presently, all three were asleep.

But Bob was first to wake. He had an infallible system. If he decided on retiring that he wanted to wake at a certain hour, at that hour he would wake It is a power many people possess. Bob called it "setting his mental alarm clock."

At four-thirty his eyes flew open and after a few seconds spent in collecting his thoughts, he carefully surveyed the interior of the tent without stirring or making a sound. Darkness had gone, and a dim gray light penetrated the tent walls, making it possible to distinguish objects. Bob could see his comrades, both sleeping soundly. He smiled in satisfaction.

Crawling out of his blankets, he dressed with infinite caution to avoid making any sound which might disturb the sleepers. Then he stole away to the bearers' camp. The Negroes still slept, but Bob shook Wimba into wakefulness and then held whispered consultation with him.

"Move fast, now," he concluded, "so as to get 'em before they wake."

Wimba, whose primitive nature took the keenest relish in practical jokes, nodded vigorously. Then he wakened half a dozen of the bearers and spoke to them in their own tongue. All grinned and several, glancing toward Bob sat at one side watching them, laughed outright and nodded as if in encouragement.

This was enough for Bob, who felt certain the surprise he was planning for his comrades, in return for the trick played upon him the previous night, would go through successfully, if only the Negroes did not delay overlong in their necessary preparations. Regarding the latter, however, a glance assured him there was not going to be any undue delay, for the Negroes selected were rapidly becoming most fearsome looking objects, as they daubed faces and bodies with the ghastly white clay used as war paint by the Kikuyu warrior when he is about to go on the warpath.

"All ready, baas," reported Wimba, approaching Bob with one of the bepainted bearers trailing behind him and tying his wrists loosely behind his back. For Wimba was to appear to be taken prisoner by a party of Kikuyus from the Bone Crusher's clan, and to that end he was being tied up.

Bob was delighted with the speed displayed.

"Very good, Wimba," he said. "I'll slip back

into my tent now and crawl into bed. Now, you're sure you understand what to say?"

The jolly black laughed. "Oh, me un'erstand, baas. Him funny. Leave to Wimba."

"Good," said Bob. "Then I'll be off. Do you follow in five minutes."

As he approached his tent, Bob wondered whether his comrades had waked yet by any chance. It was too early for them. But if they had waked, and had noted his absence, the probability was they would become suspicious when Wimba and the "war party" appeared on the scene.

A hasty look about, however, reassured him. The boys had not moved from the positions in which he had left them. They were sleeping evenly. If either had been snoring, Bob would have suspected feigning. But such was not the case.

Smiling satisfiedly, he hastily disrobed and got back into his "flea" bag. Hardly had he settled down again, than Wimba poked his head into the tent and, catching Bob's meaning glance and nod of the head, shouldered his way inside, hands bound behind him. And close at his heels came six of the most fearful looking warriors one could find in all Africa.

CHAPTER XI.

TURN ABOUT.

THREE of the warriors bore hide shields and spears, which Bob knew to be those given him and his comrades by Chief Ruku-Ru upon their induction into the clan as warriors. The bearers carried no such war paraphernalia. And these had been taken from the baggage. The others handled wicked-appearing clubs studded with spikes, such as sometimes were used in battling smaller animals.

All six were the tallest and best formed amongst the bearers. And hastily though they had bedaubed themselves, yet the job had been thorough-going. As he looked at the grinning mask on the chest of the tallest who was to enact the role of leader, Bob shuddered involuntarily.

So noiseless had been the entry of the party into the tent that Jack and Frank still slept soundly and Wimba, who knew the location of every object in the tent, experienced no difficulty in collecting the automatics lying close to each sleeper. Bob nodded

approval. Here was something of which he had failed to take account. Good for Wimba. He wasn't taking any chances on having his men potted before explanations could be made.

Then Wimba with a toe stirred first Jack and then Frank, and as they opened their eyes Bob composed his features into a glare of angry surprise in keeping with the role he had set himself to act.

Both newly-roused boys struggled upright, as did Bob. And beside each a warrior with knobbed club threateningly upraised sprang to take his place. Fear written in every feature, Wimba stood cringing in the middle of the tent, gazing from one to the other of the boys and trying to speak, but experiencing difficulty, apparantly, in emitting any sound at all. He was the picture of a man in mortal terror. And Bob almost forgot himself and the part he must play, in his delight at Wimba's histrionic abilities.

As for Jack and Frank, so real did it all seem to them that there was no thought in their minds but what a terrible calamity had befallen the party. The camp had been raided, and at the very moment when they believed themselves in friendly territory and had not considered it necessary to post guards. Wimba was a prisoner. And some ghastly fate

undoubtedly awaited themselves. Jack and Frank both were pale. And seeing them glance about wildly, as if in search of their revolvers, Bob was mightily pleased that Wimba's forethought had removed the weapons from reach.

Before either Frank or Jack could speak, Bob took charge of the situation. Glaring ferociously as the black warrior towering above him with upraised club, who glared just as ferociously at him in return, Bob shouted to Wimba:

"What's the meaning of this, Wimba?"

"Him Bone Crusher's warriors, baas," returned the latter in tones of purest terror. "Oh, baas, save Wimba."

"The Bone Crusher's men?" shouted Bob. "Why, we left their vicinity days ago."

"Very angry clan," returned Wimba. "They follow. Say white young men spoil their plans. So now they capture white young men."

Bob groaned, and casting a glance of despair toward Jack and Frank, he added in a husky voice:

"This looks tough, fellows. If we'd only kept a guard."

"Can't we fight 'em." Frank was shaky-voiced but game.

"I'd be the last fellow to hold back," said Bob. "But what chance would we have? Cumbered up

in these blankets and without weapons? We'd just get our heads split open."

"Wh—what of father and Niellsen?" asked Jack.

He was terrified and showed it. And who could blame him? Nevertheless, his thought was not for himself but his father.

"Um prisoner, too, baas," said Wimba, mournfully.

Jack groaned and buried his face in his hands.

"Look here, Wimba," said Bob, "ask that big chief what they intend to do with us, and when they're going to begin."

Wimba and the majestic-looking leader of the war party conversed rapidly in the Kikuyu tongue. Then Wimba turned to Bob. There was respect in the tone with which he addressed him.

"Um Bone Crusher's men say Mikalwa great fighter. Bone Crusher gone, so they want Mikalwa for chief."

"What? Who's Mikalwa? Me?"

Wimba nodded. And the tall leader approached Bob and bowed low before him.

"Fine," shouted Bob, leaping to his feet. "Then there's nothing to worry about. I'll just order you fellows set free." And he turned toward Jack and Frank.

But Wimba shook his head.

"Mikalwa to be chief," he said. "But others must die. Mikalwa can't save them."

Bob struck an heroic attitude, arms folded across his chest. The fact that he was in pajamas, and that the pants were slipping down while the jacket hung together by only one button, rather spoiled the effect. But nobody laughed. The situation was too serious for Jack and Frank, whose anxious gaze roved from Bob to Wimba to the leader of the raiders and back to Bob again.

"Tell them, Wimba," cried Bob, "tell these rascals that Mikalwa prefers to die with his own people. If he cannot set his friends free, he will not become their chief. They must treat him as one of their prisoners."

"Bob, Bob," begged Frank, in a broken voice, "don't throw away your only chance."

At the tone employed by his closest friend, big Bob began to weaken. Poor Frank's feelings had been harrowed sufficiently, and Jack's, too, he thought, to atone in full for the playing of that snake trick on him the night before. However, he was nearing the end of the little drama which he had concocted with Wimba, and so he decided to play it out.

Wimba in the meantime, as soon as Bob had finished speaking had addressed the pseudo-chief.

The latter replied, and Wimba turning with beaming face cried joyfully:

"Him say all right, baas. If Mikalwa be big chief him can set all friends free."

"Good," shouted Bob. And turning toward his astounded comrades, still seated in their blankets, he flung out both hands in a magnificent gesture, as if showering largess upon them. "Fellows," he cried, "receive your freedom at the hands of Big Chief Mikalwa, otherwise known as"—he paused for dramatic effect, then added—"the snake charmer."

Spinning about he laughed and said: "All right, Wimba. Show's over. Give each of the actors an extra help of tobacco. I'm proud of you and your troupe."

Wimba spoke rapidly to the others, and on each face broke out a broad smile while the trio standing guard over the boys lowered their clubs and relaxed their hostile attitude. The smiles gave way to chuckles as the Negroes took in the dazed expression spreading over the features of Frank and Jack. And then as Bob, unable longer to control his mirth, broke into loud laughter, the Negroes followed suit.

With a vigorous thrust of his bare foot against the chest of each, Bob sent Jack and Frank toppling backward into their blankets. With a wave of the

hand, he indicated Wimba and his impromptu minstrel troupe should withdraw. And while Jack and Frank still were struggling to right themselves and, at the same time, to readjust their reeling thoughts to this outrageous development of the situation, the chuckling Kikuyus filed out with Wimba bringing up the rear and casting knowing grins over his shoulder at Bob.

"Look here," said Jack, sitting up and regarding Bob with a rueful expression, "did you honestly put those Johnnies up to that?"

"I can't believe it yet," said Frank, running his fingers through his uncombed hair.

Bob laughed. "Just a little show for your benefit," he said. "I thought you'd appreciate what real talent could do—after your own puny effort last night."

"I'll bet I'm still as white as those ghastly Negroes were painted," said Jack. "I don't expect to find my natural youthful color restored for a week at least."

Frank said nothing, but getting up went over to Bob and offered his hand.

"Yours was a jolly good job, old boy," he said. "Ours was a kind of mean trick. Sorry."

Once more amity was restored. And Mr. Hampton appearing at the entrance to the tent at that

moment, all three began rehearsing together the story of recent occurrences. What between their bubbling laughter and their frequent interruptions of each other, it was difficult for the older man to gain a real appreciation of what had occurred. Finally, he threw up his hands.

"One at a time, one at a time," he pleaded. "And anyway, save it up to tell me later. We must get under way at once, if we are going to ford this river today."

CHAPTER XII.

AN UNEXPECTED JAUNT.

FINDING a ford, however, was no easy matter, for the river was both wide and deep. Several times the bearers ventured into the water at likely-looking places, but the rapid deepening and the swiftness of the current caused them to withdraw in haste.

The country in which they found themselves was sparsely-inhabited marsh land. The last village, occupying a high plateau, lay two days' journey to the rear. Since leaving it they had failed to encounter any local tribesmen. Only by luck had they found knolls of dry firm ground projecting above the jungle growth of the marsh on which to pitch camp the two nights spent in this district.

Mr. Hampton, fearing the effects of the miasmatic surroundings on the health of all, was resolved that this day should see them cross the river and into the hills rolling up in the background on the other side. Therefore, he kept the bearers plod-

ding through the thick jungle growth of reeds and trees along the bank in search of a ford. For, although of human habitation there seemed little evidence, yet of animals there were many signs. And undoubtedly some of the latter were accustomed to cross the river at some point or other in the vicinity.

None being discovered, however, toward noon, Mr. Hampton decided they would build a raft. Rope a-plenty was in their equipment. When the raft was ready, a bearer would swim the river with the end of a rope to be attached to a tree on the other side. By fastening the rope similarly on the near side of the river, they would obtain a ferry, along which the raft could be pulled back and forth until everybody and all the supplies and articles of equipment could be sent across.

The work of building the raft out of felled logs bound together with tough vines and creepers went on apace, and by the middle of afternoon everything was in readiness for the attempt. All three of the boys were expert swimmers and volunteered to make the crossing with the rope. But Mr. Hampton would not give his consent.

"As to your ability to swim several times the distance, there can be no question," he said. "But one can never tell when crocodiles will appear in these

African rivers. Wimba tells me there are several men amongst our bearers who have a reputation for fighting crocodiles. I'll see whether either or both want to swim across."

The two men mentioned by Wimba readily consented to make the crossing, being eager to receive the extra pay for the hazard promised by Mr. Hampton. And with knives clutched between their teeth, they plunged into the river, the rope paying out behind them. However, although through his glasses, Jack, who was maintaining a lookout, could discern three of the long sinister beasts sunning themselves on a sandy shelf along the opposite shore but considerably below the point at which the swimmers planned to land, yet none appeared in midstream to attack the two Kikuyus. And the latter swimming strongly, presently were seen to clamber out of the water. Then they disappeared into the luxuriant undergrowth, to reappear a few minutes later shouting that the rope had been made fast to a tree.

"First, Dad," cried Jack. "You wouldn't let us swim the river, so now you must let us be first to cross on the raft."

Mr. Hampton smiled indulgently. "You're as big as I, Jack," he said, "but you're only a kid still, aren't you? All right. Let it be as you say.

You three and six of the bearers can make the first crossing with the major portion of our stores. Then send the raft back, and Niellsen and I will cross over with our photographic equipment and whatever supplies you haven't taken. Then Wimba can follow with the rest of the bearers."

"But, Mr. Hampton," Frank objected, "do you believe we ought to put all our supplies, or even the major portion, in one load? What if the raft upsets?"

"You're right, Frank," said the older man, approvingly. "We would be out of luck in a case like that. No, we'll split our provisions, and send over only half at a time."

"The same idea can be applied to our radio equipment, too," said Jack. "We'll take several of the portable receiving sets with us, as well as that emergency sending set. You can bring the one we've been using, when you come, together with the remaining portable receivers."

The good sense of both these suggestions being readily apparent, they were adopted and, carrying half the provisions and half the radio equipment, the three boys with six bearers sent out to negotiate the crossing.

Long poles had been cut and with these half the number on the raft essayed to pole, while the bal-

ance pulled on the rope stretching now from bank to bank and tied about trees at either end.

But almost immediately it became apparent the force of the river current had been underestimated. So strong was the downstream drag that all soon found themselves working as if for their very lives to make headway. Moreover, the rope drawn as taut as a violin string by the force of their weight upon it began to screech with a dry sound.

"We better turn back, Jack," panted Frank, from his position at the rear end of the raft where he was battling valiantly with a pole. "In a minute we won't be able to touch bottom any longer, and then our unsupported weight is going to be too much for that rope."

Hardly had the words been uttered than there came a sudden sharp report. The rope had parted at a weak spot. The two ends fell into the water, out of reach. And at once, seized in the hungry clutch of the swift current, the raft was whirled into midstream and started down river.

Fortunately, Matse was of the number aboard. And when Jack shouted an order to the bearers not to use their poles lest they be snatched from their grasp, as the river was running too strongly at this point, Matse translated his command. At that, however, Jack's forethought came a moment too late to

prevent one of the blacks from losing his pole. It was sucked from his grasp as the raft whirled along, when he attempted to strike bottom with it to arrest their progress. Only through the fact that Bob throwing an arm about his waist at the crucial moment tugged him inward did the black escape following his pole.

"Tell the men to sit down and pull in their poles," Jack ordered Matse. "Pretty soon the current will swing in toward one shore or another as we round a bend, and then we may stand a chance to strike bottom and pole ashore. Try to make them see that it is necessary to save the raft and equipment, Matse, so that they won't jump off and swim ashore."

The intelligent young Kikuyu nodded his comprehension and then began to lay down the law to his comrades in their own tongue.

In the meantime, Mr. Hampton could be seen starting the bearers on shore down stream. And Jack knew his father's thought was his, namely that some turn of the current might throw the raft toward the river bank and thus afford those on land a chance to be of aid.

"If we only had a rope," he groaned.

"What's that your father is shouting, Jack? Can you understand him?" asked Bob.

Jack shook his head.

"Too far away," he said. "This river certainly is sweeping us along at a great rate. There, I can't see them any more."

And standing up, Jack waved his handkerchief as the raft swept around a bend and his father and the party ashore were lost to view.

Then Jack crouched down between Bob and Frank.

"We'll have to remember one thing, fellows," he said, lowering his voice to a whisper. "And that is that these blacks will stick to the raft, perhaps, if we can manage to keep them from becoming excited and apprehensive. But if they lose their heads, they'll jump overboard and swim for it. And in that case our chance of saving the raft and all these supplies and equipment will be mighty slim. So it is up to us to keep smiling, because they'll be watching us. In fact, they're watching us now."

The blacks were, indeed, casting anxious glances toward the three boys. And the latter, accepting Jack's outline of the situation, grinned in a way to disarm apprehension. Nevertheless, they could see from the way in which the Kikuyus turned to gaze at the water that they were speculating upon the possibilities of swimming ashore.

"Can the men swim, Matse?" asked Jack of the

young interpreter who crouched nearest them, staring with fascinated gaze at the swift water bearing them along.

"All, baas," replied Matse. "They say they stay long as can, but will swim if no can save raft. They 'fraid crocodile but more 'fraid water fall."

"Waterfall?" cried Frank, in alarm.

Matse nodded. "Me no can tell, baas," he said. "Fella-boys say river um run too fast. Waterfall soon."

Bob jumped to his feet. "Look here. We can't sit here idle, waiting to be tossed toward one bank or the other, while all the time we may be skidding along toward a falls. I can't hear any roar indicating one near at hand. Just the same, this river is running mighty fast, and there may be a falls ahead. Let's get some of these poles together and try to rig up a stern sweep to guide us inshore."

"That's the idea," approved Frank. "It's about our only chance to save the raft, and if we don't do it we may soon all be in the water trying to swim to shore."

Matse called to the bearers who shoved their poles across the raft toward the boys, and watched eagerly while Bob set to work to develop his idea.

What he wanted was a paddle on the end of several poles lashed together. The poles were avail-

able, and the paddle blade was easily obtained by ripping off several heavy boards from a packing case. But hammer and stout nails were none. However, Bob got around that by tearing up many feet of stout creeper binding the logs of the raft at one end. Then he placed the boards between the ends of two poles and lashed them in place with the vine.

"Now for it," he said, surveying his work dubiously. "It looks strong enough, but whether it will hold together is a question. However, here goes."

The felled logs comprising the raft were in several layers, criss-crossing each other. In none of these layers had the logs been placed tightly together. Bob poked around until he found a succession of openings in the various layers of logs which were in line with each other, and then managed to push the paddle through and into the water. A little pressing apart of the logs and tearing of vines here and there enlarged the opening sufficiently to permit slanting the poles forward so far that the blade trailing at the rear became a genuinely effective sweep.

"Hurray," yelled Bob, jubilantly, as the raft began to swing sluggishly but steadily toward shore. "Get some of those fellows to help hold this steady, Matse."

Two of the bearers sprang with alacrity to positions on the two poles lashed together which constituted the handle of the sweep.

Bob stationed them in position to hold the paddle steady at an angle which swept the raft shoreward, for he was not using it as a sweep for propulsion but as steering oar.

Then he stood back to contemplate his work with a look of pride on his face.

"Well, I guess that'll turn the trick if the paddle doesn't break," he said to Jack. "The tug of the water is tremendous."

"Yes," replied the latter, leaning close and speaking in a whisper, "or if we aren't swept into the rapids ahead. Take a look but don't draw the attention of the Kikuyus. They are so interested in watching the result of your labors and in playing around with your steering oar that they haven't seen yet. There. Down stream."

Bob looked.

Some distance ahead, where the river swept around a big island, scattered rocks jutted above the water of both channels. And over them foamed the river.

Then the first sound of the rapids was borne to their ears.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE RIVER'S CLUTCH.

THE raft leaped forward like a thing alive. Kikuyus sweating at the steering oar were unable to point the unwieldly craft inshore any longer. Frightened cries broke from the blacks as they saw the spouters ahead, saw too the black teeth of the basaltic rocks waiting to tear them.

"Back, back," shouted Jack, stationed on the shoreward side of the raft. He waved his arms frantically in warning to the blacks. "Don't let them jump in, Matse," he screamed. "They'd drown."

But the thoroughly frightened blacks had lost all awe of their superiors. They continued to crowd forward as if planning to leap overboard.

"Look out, Jack," cried Frank, standing in the bow, his attention diverted from the river ahead by Jack's predicament. "You can't stop them. They'll brush you into the river if you get in their way."

But big Bob saw the danger to his comrade, too.

He gained Jack's side and, legs braced, facing the hysterically frightened blacks, he waved his automatic in their faces.

"Any man deserting will be shot," he cried. "Matse, tell these fellows we want to save their lives. We'll swing the raft against the island below us. If everybody works on the steering oar it can be done. And we'll all be saved."

Matse also had succumbed to the fright of the moment, along with his companions. But not to the same extent. One look ahead showed him the possibilities and, flinging himself in front of his wavering assistants, he shouted at them in their own tongue. The boys could not understand his words, but there was no misreading his tone. He was lashing them with whips of scorn. And that it was proving effective was plain to be seen.

"Fella-boys help, baas," cried Matse, in the end, turning to Bob. "You tell um what can do."

It was an anxious moment for the three boys. Fate had thrust them without any preliminary warning into a mighty tight place, indeed. Ahead lay possible, even probable, disaster. To escape to the shore by swimming was out of the question. The current was running like a mill race, and even the strongest of swimmers could not have stemmed it, but must of necessity have been swept along

helpless in its clutch. And upon the young shoulders of the trio rested the responsibility for extricating not themselves alone from this threatening monster of a river, but also the half dozen blacks. Moreover, if it were humanly possible, they desired also to save the raft and its contents.

But was it possible? Was it possible to save the lives of all concerned? Could they hope to save the raft? Was not their only chance to be flung upon some of the rocks which, bare, jagged, wet from the constant spray spouting over them, offering only insecure hold at best, seemed to leap toward them, so swiftly were they borne along? And then the raft would go whirling and bumping into the further rapids around the bend which as yet they could not see and be swept to destruction over the falls they suspected lay not far away by reason of the growing volume of sound which came to them, the dull booming roar of water tumbling, cascading, over a precipice.

At such moments, one's eyes seem to drink in all the surroundings as if in one vast comprehensive glance, and one's thoughts stimulated by the unwonted danger race madly. It was so with the boys. They saw the high wooded bluffs, rank jungle growth descending to the water's edge. They saw the broad river, fully half a mile wide, sweeping on

like a great sheet of glass to crash and splinter upon the rocks at the bend and upon the wooded island in the middle. What lay beyond that mighty curve, where the river turning sharply bore away to the right whence came the roar of the waterfall which they suspected to be there, they could not see. All this they saw, all this their vision grasped, in that one sweeping glance when a moment seemed an eternity. And their thoughts moved as swiftly as sight. In fact, only one possible salvation for all lay ahead. And all three grasped it simultaneously.

"The island," cried Jack. "We must try to reach the island."

This island was in shape long and narrow and as they drew nearer, they could discern the contour of that portion at the upstream end quite clearly. At the tip were rocks in a jumbled mass which would spell destruction to the raft, perhaps to themselves, if they were swept upon them. But, caught in a current setting into the channel between the island and the left bank of the river, they could see as they drew closer to the island that just below the rocks lay a cove with a shelving sandy shore.

They were still some distance above this point, and Bob believed they could maneuvre the raft into the cove before being swept beyond it and into the rocks which began not far away. He said as much

to the others, who nodded agreement, then he leaped to position at the steering oar. Three of the blacks helped him swing the clumsy but effective sweep and hold it in position. Steadily but surely, the raft swung in toward the cove.

Frank and Jack in the meantime took command at the bow of the raft, if the square end downstream can so be dignified. And Matse passed the word to the two remaining blacks of what was intended. All five were to stand ready to leap into the water as they approached the cove and help to direct the raft into it.

On swept the raft. And now it could be seen that, even though the direction given it by the steering oar was carrying it steadily toward the island, yet so strong was the drag of the current upon its unwieldly bulk that the raft would arrive only by the narrowest of margins, if at all. And, if they missed the cove, almost certain destruction awaited beyond.

"If I think we're going to miss it, Bob," shouted Jack from the bow, "I'll warn you in time so that you and the blacks can run forward and swim for the cove."

Bob shouted an "All right," to show he had heard. But he did not look up. The improvised steering oar was bending under the strain placed

upon it, and he was fearful it would snap at any moment. Still it held, however. And Bob was grimly determined that as long as there remained a chance to bring their rude craft to shore, he'd stick to it.

A sensible diminution in the tug of the water a moment later apprised Bob that they had managed to swing the raft out of the center of the current. They were close to the island now. But they were close to the cove, too. In fact, they were almost abreast of it. And that meant that unless they could swing the raft in at once, it would be carried beyond the only possible landing place.

Bob decided to change his tactics. Instead of using his improvised paddle as steering oar, he would use it as a sweep. The raft had been spun around so that the forward end faced the shore. Bob couldn't speak to the Kikuyus in their own tongue, but he could signal his intentions. And this he did by thrusting them away and himself straining to work the oar back and forth. Then he beckoned them to assist him, and they understood and leaped to obey.

Over his shoulder he glanced anxiously toward the forward end, and with a leap of the heart he saw that they were making progress. The thresh-ing of the sweep, acting as a paddle wheel, was

sending them toward the shore. But still their progress was not sufficient to put them into the cove for, although the pull of the current had diminished, it still was sweeping them along at a rate which threatened to carry them beyond the safety zone.

But Frank and Jack also were alive to the danger. And they had changed their original plan of all leaping into the water and attempting to pull the raft ashore by swimming. For as they drew closer to the cove, Jack had gotten the idea that, perhaps, the river grew shallower here and had thrust one of the long poles into the water. It had been almost torn from his hand. Nevertheless, he had touched bottom.

So now the two boys and the three blacks not engaged on the sweep with Bob lined the down-stream side of the raft, two to a pole. And at every thrust they touched bottom.

For a long minute it was touch and go, and whether the combined efforts of the men at the poles with those at the sweep would succeed in bringing the raft into the backwater of the cove, hung in the balance. But human determination defeated the river, robbed it of its victims. After proceeding only by inches, the raft suddenly shot ahead, as if the river deciding it was defeated spurned this stub-born craft at the last. And the next moment, the

raft was bobbing in the backwater of the cove, where the current was not perceptible, while just beyond the rocks guarding the two extremeties of its half-moon shore the river rolled on so swiftly as to make a sharp line of cleavage between the main stream and the cove.

After their strenuous exertions, all were a trifle bewildered to find themselves thus suddenly shot into safety with no call to extend themselves further. The Kikuyus began chattering like magpies and, leaping into the shallow water, dragged the raft up until the forward end rested on the sand above the water line. As for the boys, they could only look at each other, each reading in the eyes of his friends unutterable relief at escape from that threat of a watery death.

Quite simply big Bob bent his head and closed his eyes. And the others did likewise. And from three profoundly grateful hearts there went up to the Divine Providence which guards poor mortals a prayer of gratitude no less sincere because unspoken.

CHAPTER XIV.

RADIO BRIDGES THE GAP.

It was not a large island, as islands go, being something less than half a mile in extent by a quarter of that in breadth. But it was densely wooded, and the underbrush was so thick as to make exploration difficult. Nevertheless, after securing the raft to the trunks of trees by means of stout creepers twisted and used as ropes, the boys pushed exploration of the island in order to determine whether there was some means of reaching the mainland from it.

That, however, would be difficult. At no place did either river bank approach the island closely. The likeliest chance appeared to be to cross to the left bank, that upon which was the main party, by means of a score of half-submerged rocks, between and over which the water boiled and foamed. These rocks lay between the forward end of the island and the shore.

"We might be able to leap from rock to rock

in some cases, and in others to bridge the chasms with poles," said Jack, considering the situation, as he and the two others, with Matse behind them, stood on the shore near these rocks.

"But then," said Frank, "we'd have to abandon the raft."

Jack nodded gloomily.

At one other point, another solution suggested itself. Near the upstream end of the island, on the side opposite that upon which they had landed, the mainland was less than one hundred yards away. And through this lesser channel the water, as they ascertained by tossing chips into the current, flowed less swiftly. A strong swimmer, heading upstream, probably would be able to make his way to the opposite shore before being swept down into the rapids below. He could carry a rope and, once such a connection was made, other ropes could be passed back and forth until a strong enough ferry was established to make it possible to transport the raft without danger of the ropes parting and letting it be carried down.

But where was rope to be obtained? Examination of the boxes revealed numbers were bound with short ends of rope. But all these tied together would not be of sufficient length to bridge the channel even once. And more than one rope, as experi-

ence had revealed, would be necessary to ensure safety.

"We might make a rope of creepers," Bob suggested, at length, as, after a survey of their resources, the three stood on the raft, gazing wryly at each other.

"Dad has several big coils of rope with him," said Jack. "If we could only get in touch with him and tell him to cross the river up above and come down on the right bank."

Bob looked at his watch. "More than three hours since we started our runaway journey," he commented. "Great Scott, I hadn't realized how long we'd been on the way. Why, we must have been carred fifteen miles downstream."

"All of that," said Jack. "And Dad will have a hard time making his way through the underbrush and jungle growth along that marshy river bank on his side of the stream. He'll keep hunting till he finds us. But we can hardly look for him to put in an appearance today. Well, thank goodness, we not only saved ourselves but the raft and its supplies, too. That's something. And we'll find a way out of this all right."

Frank who, although the smallest of the three suffered most from the heat oppression, had remained silent, sitting on a box and fanning his

flushed face with his sun helmet. Now he leaped to his feet, and his eyes lost the drowsy look induced by the heat and sparkled with animation.

"Jack, if we've been gone more than three hours, it's dollars to doughnuts that we can get in touch with your father."

"You mean——"

"Radio. No less," answered Frank, triumphantly. Then he proceeded to elaborate.

"Your father, as you say, cannot have pushed his way very far through that jungle growth in three short hours. He knows that whether the blacks swam for it or not, we would stick to the raft as long as there remained a chance to save it. So he will figure either that we have reached shore somewhere below him with the raft or else that we are still being carried downstream. After he has forced his way through the jungle a mile or two, what is he most likely to do? Why, to set up the radio and start calling for us on the chance that we are doing likewise. Doesn't that seem probable."

"Probable or not," said Bob, beginning at once to poke about amongst the contents of the raft in search of the box containing the spare transmitting set; "at least putting up the radio will give us something to do."

"Right," said Jack, laying his hand on a case, "and here it is. Now to get it set up."

The blacks, with the exception of Matse who sat dozing on the bank, were not in sight, having retired to a glade back amongst the trees and gone to sleep. Their philosophy seemed to be to leave worry to the young white men.

"Anyhow, we wouldn't need them," decided Jack. "Because we won't have to take this stuff ashore to set it up. We can put it up right here on the raft. Water is a fine conductor and will give us a good ground. And we can have better luck out here in the open with our aerial than in amongst the trees."

With this the others agreed, and all went to work unpacking the apparatus. Little was said as they worked, and so expert were they at this job of putting up a set in double-quick time in the wilds that in a very short space the loop aerial was in place, all the wires were connected, and then Jack sat down at the instrument and began tuning in to the wave length his father would be employing.

At first there was no response, try as he would. And Jack feared that perhaps water had penetrated the packing boxes and saturated some of the wiring. He put off the headpiece, and the three boys went over every inch of wire. True enough, what Jack

feared had really occurred. But only one small wire was wet. Armature windings and other portions of the apparatus which could not have been dried out readily had they become saturated, had escaped.

"I suppose now we'll have to build a fire and dry this out," said Jack, detaching the three foot strand of insulated wire connecting one post of the tuning coil with one of the end posts of the switch. "It's a nuisance, but I can't find any replacement wire."

"No use building a fire," said Frank. "This sun is hot enough, goodness knows. That strand ought to dry out soon enough. Let's put it here," he added, indicating a packing case standing in the sun from the surface of which heat waves visibly radiated.

That was done and then the boys sought the shaded end of the raft where they crouched, talking intermittently, while awaiting the result of the drying-out process. Several times one or other went and turned over the wire and at length Jack triumphantly declared it thoroughly dry. Then the connection was restored, and again he put on the headpiece and tuned in.

Bob and Frank looked on anxiously. Almost at once a broad grin broke over Jack's face.

"It's Dad," he cried; "calling for us."

Then pulling the transmitter toward him, he began to reply. This two-way set for both transmitting and receiving was of the boys' own design. Simpler, more compact, than any device turned out by the great companies manufacturing radio supplies, it had served them well in other lands and climes and in the most perilous of circumstances had proven their staunchest support. The impact of the voice against a sensitive diaphragm acted to automatically close the receiver. It was this which constituted the chief feature of the device, making the jump from transmission to reception and vice versa a matter of no account at all.

Bob and Frank, unable to hear what Mr. Hampton had to say, but listening to Jack's remarks, gathered the drift of the conversation. As Frank had surmised, the main party had been so delayed in pushing down river through the jungle growth along the bank that only a couple of miles had been made. Then, finding no trace of the runaway raft, Mr. Hampton had returned to their old camp site and obtained the radio which had not been set up for some days. Rigging it up with Niellsen's aid, he had at once begun calling. When no reply was received, he had continued to call at fifteen-minute intervals. And it was one of these calls which had caught Jack's ear.

Jack was outlining their situation on the island to his father. And after having heard how matters stood, the latter apparently, so far as Bob and Frank could gather from Jack's replies, was of their opinion regarding a method of rescue. Consequently, he intended again to essay the crossing of the river at the old camp site, after which he would make his way down the right bank which was higher ground and freer of jungle growth to the point opposite the island where the boys believed a swimmer could cross the channel with a rope.

Finally, Jack closed communication and turned to his comrades. Relief at this quick opening of communication with the main party was uppermost in the minds of all. Once more they had reason to be thankful that radio was at their command.

"And a mighty good thing, too," said Jack, "that we took Frank's advice, and split our equipment, so that both Dad and ourselves are supplied."

The attempt at rescue, however, could not be made until the following morning. The better part of the day already was sped. Mr. Hampton would spend the balance in crossing the river and starting downstream. He might, of course, reach a position opposite them before nightfall, as four hours of daylight yet were left. But the crossing could not

be attempted except in daylight and so he would have to wait until the following day.

At length, after turning the matter over and considering it from all angles, the boys decided to go ashore and prepare some food. They had not eaten since their early morning breakfast. Matse, accordingly, was aroused and sent to stir up the bearers. A case of tinned foods was opened, and the boys tossed materials for a meal to the bearers on shore.

CHAPTER XV.

RESCUED.

Not until shortly after dusk that night was Mr. Hampton heard from. Then a hail from the right bank of the river near the head of the island was heard by the boys who had taken up their position about a fire, for the night had become chilly. Calls sounded back and forth across the water. Finally, assured of each other's safety, both parties retired for the night, prepared to attempt the work of rescue as soon as dawn should bring sufficient light.

Bob as the strongest swimmer of the three boys was eager to make the crossing. But two obvious enough reasons were adduced to make him abandon the idea. In the first place, the boys did not possess rope. That Mr. Hampton had, and it would have to be carried to the island by a member of his party. In the second place, even though the current in the right hand channel was less swift than the other side of the island, yet a swimmer setting out for shore from the tip of the island would be hard put to it to escape being carried down stream into

the rapids. On the other hand, a swimmer taking to the water from the river bank at a point considerably above the island, could count upon making the crossing in safety. Moreover, he would have the rope from shore and, if he became endangered, his comrades could pull him to safety.

So it was that one of the two Kikuyus who had crossed the river at the old camp site the previous day again was selected. And as soon as daylight came, he set out.

The boys with Matse and their bearers watched from the island. They had been up since before dawn. On the other shore they could see the Kikuyus congregated in a chattering group, while Mr. Hampton directed operations and Niellsen could be seen at his motion picture camera, prepared to photograph any dramatic incidents as they occurred.

The Kikuyu, a rangy fellow more than six feet in height, swam strongly until well into the current. Then he let himself drift in order to estimate its strength. Satisfied that if he headed directly for the island, he would be borne beyond it and into the rapids below, he then could be seen to head straight across stream.

Even then, however, the swift current carried him

along at such a rate as to make it unlikely he would reach the island.

Bob shook his head, voicing the thought in all their minds.

"He'll have to swim up stream or he'll never make it."

Evidently, the swimmer was of the same opinion. For the next moment the watchers on both the river bank and the island could see him alter his course and assume a direction calculated to carry him across the river on a long upstream slant except for the effect upon his progress of the current.

The boys watched his head, black and round, cleaving the sunlit water, and noted with commendation the steady rise and fall of his arms in an overhead stroke that gave powerful impetus to his lithe body.

"I believe he'll make it all right," said Bob, after a moment.

Closer and closer drew the swimmer. And now the boys saw a long thin line of rope trailing through the water behind him. It was tied about his waist and was being paid out by other Negroes who were following down stream along the right bank. A narrow shelf of land, free of underbrush, lay between the river and the bluffs behind, affording them sufficient footing.

The Kikuyus on the island shouted frequent encouragement to the swimmer, who once or twice waved an arm in token of acknowledgment. He betrayed no exhaustion, although the effort he was putting into his task was great. Finally, he won through the strongest portion of the current and found himself in more quiet water, after which it was only a matter of moments until willing hands had him safe ashore.

Then began the work of pulling in the line about his waist, to the other end of which Mr. Hampton had tied three ends of cable, figuring that nothing less than three heavy ropes would provide a ferry sufficiently stout to ensure safety in the transport of a raft from the island.

The question of whether the original raft could be towed around the end of the island from its anchorage on the side opposite to that of the ferry was quickly decided in the negative. Inspection of the route convinced the boys that even if it could be poled and tugged by ropes into position against the rush of the current, yet the rocks strewing the river at the upstream tip of the island could not be negotiated.

It was decided, therefore, that a new raft would have to be built. Mr. Hampton was apprised of this, and went into camp on the river bank. There

was nothing he could do to help. With them on the raft the boys had axes for everybody, and there was plenty of timber growing on the island to build any number of rafts. It was merely a question of time until a raft could be built, and in the meantime there was naught the main body of the expedition could do except wait.

Soon, then, axes were ringing, and there was a great ripping and tearing of creepers and vines with which to bind the logs together. Frank had suggested dismantling the original raft and carrying the logs across the island to the other shore, but this plan had been vetoed, as to drag the logs through five hundred feet of rank jungle growth would involve more labor than to cut other logs on the farther shore where the new raft was to be launched.

It would be hard enough, when the time came, to transfer the boxes and bales from the old raft to the new.

At the end of several hours, the new raft was built. It had been made considerably smaller than the original one, in fact, little more than a third its size. Thus the danger of placing too great strain on the ropes of the ferry was removed. And the boys found that, even bearing a considerable cargo

and two men, the raft rode buoyantly, with the top well above water.

"Pretty good job for amateurs, I'll say," remarked Bob, as he contemplated the raft before stepping aboard. He and Matse had been selected to make the first trip, and the equipment they were to carry already had been stowed on the raft.

The big fellow had reason to feel pride in their accomplishment. He himself had worked like a Trojan, doing the work of two men, and spurring on the bearers to greater exertions by his example.

"All aboard, Matse," he cried. And the young interpreter grinning followed him.

The three lengths of cable sent them by Mr. Hampton had been fastened to a strong tree at the water's edge. The other ends had been made fast in similar fashion. So low had the cables been tied that the ends were only a few feet above water, while the middle portion sagged into the stream. From side to side of the raft, front, rear and in the middle, had been tied stout lengths of rope, passing over the cable. Tied to the forward end, moreover, was a strong line lighter in weight than the cables, with which Mr. Hampton's party could pull the raft ahead. Other means of propulsion were long stout poles.

Wielding these, Bob and Matse poled out into

the stream. They found they touched bottom for a considerable distance. And all went well until they neared the middle of the channel, when the water deepened to the point where poling became an impossibility. Then laying the poles aside, the two raftsmen seized the cable in their hands and what with the tugs they gave it combined with the steady pull from shore, they managed to negotiate the channel without too much difficulty. Whereupon, once more finding themselves in shallower water they again fell to poling and so at length reached the bank in safety.

While bearers were unloading the raft, Bob pointed out to Mr. Hampton an additional safeguard. The rope with which those on shore had pulled the raft ahead seemed to him too light in weight. No heavier rope, however, was available to be attached in its place. But another rope of the same weight was added. Then Jack was signalled to pull the raft back to the island by means of another light rope attached to the rear.

Trip after trip until four had been made the rude ferry was pulled back and forth across the channel without mishap. When all the goods carried down stream on that wild ride had been recovered, the afternoon was well advanced. And Mr. Hampton

announced they would camp where they were until the following day.

"Good enough," said Niellsen, "that will give me a chance to photograph the rapids and the water falls."

"Oh, you found a fall?" said Frank.

Niellsen laughed. "I got cut up pretty badly scrambling through the rocks and briers to the top of that bluff," he said, pointing to the promontory a half mile distant, around which swept the river. "But I was rewarded when I got there by sight of a water falls that must be all of seven hundred feet. The river narrows to less than a hundred yards in width, and a tremendous volume of water pours over the lip of the falls. I had only a pocket camera with me. Now I want to go back with a motion picture camera, and get some good film of it. You lads probably want to go along and take a look at what you missed seeing close at hand."

"Close at hand, is right," commented Frank. "A little more and we would have been part of it."

CHAPTER XVI.

A CHANGE IN PLANS.

THE next day Mr. Hampton called the boys and Niellsen into conference regarding their future course. They had put the country of the Kikuyus quite definitely behind them in their passage of the marshy region and now of this river, of which they did not know the name, although Mr. Hampton believed it to be probably a branch of the Terywell.

"We are on the fringes of big game country by all accounts," he said, "both from what I picked up in Nairobi and from what Wimba tells me. West of us lies Lake Victoria; east, Mount Kenya."

"That's the high one, isn't it, Dad?" asked Jack.

Mr. Hampton nodded. "Said to be 17,010 feet," he commented. "Next to Mount Kilimanjaro, which is also in Kenya Colony, lying southeast of Nairobi and more than 19,000 feet in height, it is the tallest peak in Africa."

"I vote for striking toward Mount Kenya," said Frank, emphatically. "We'll get into higher altitudes and escape from this awful heat."

"Huh," grunted Bob. "It wasn't so hot that night eight or ten days ago when we couldn't get enough blankets to keep warm."

He referred to one of the meteoric changes in temperature which makes Africa land of extremes, when even the equatorial region a day of blazing sunshine and suffocating oppressive heat is frequently succeeded by terrific rains and a freezing night.

Niellsen looked thoughtful. "It's not such a bad idea to strike for Mount Kenya," he said, "if only there's a chance of getting some films of animal life. But what are game conditions like over there?"

"Wimba says they're pretty good," said Mr. Hampton. "However, he believes that in the Kavirondo country northeast of Lake Victoria, they will be better. And if we strike in that direction, we can replenish our supplies at Kisumu on the lake. It is on the railroad from the coast, and lake steamers touch there, too."

"Lake steamers?" Bob cried in surprise.

Mr. Hampton nodded. "The immediate region around Lake Victoria was developing rapidly when the war halted its progress. Germans, British, Belgians and Portuguese, all are in this country hereabouts, you know. Their armed forces of blacks officered by whites messed life up pretty badly.

However, since the end of the war I was given to understand in Nairobi development has been picking up again at a great rate. So at Kisumu, which is the trade center for a big region, although only a little town itself, we undoubtedly will be able to replenish our supplies. And as we are beginning to run rather low, I believe it will be wise to do so."

"Kisumu for me," said Bob, "and the Kavirondo region. If big game is to be found there, especially. I want to bag at least one lion on this trip. And so far we haven't encountered one."

"And I want an elephant," said Jack.

Niellsen laughed. "I want to shoot lions and elephants, too," he said. "But with the camera."

"Looks as if I were outvoted," said Frank, mopping his sticky face, for the heat of the day still persisted.

Mr. Hampton regarded him sympathetically.

"Don't worry. Frank," he said. "We'll get into mountainous country up there, and, in fact, we'll be out of these Kikuyu plains pretty quickly. That range of hills ahead form the outposts of the mountains of which Kenya is the tallest peak, unless I'm much mistaken. We'll be into them by tomorrow. And then, even though the weather will continue hot, yet it won't be the muggy heat of these lowlands."

The next morning, accordingly, camp was struck and the expedition set out for Kisumu, which was reached after a week of uneventful travel. From their first day after crossing the river, they entered a populous region. Villages became numerous.

Anxious to reach the Kavirondo country, after first stopping at Kisumu for a renewal of supplies, Mr. Hampton did not loiter on the way. And as Niellsen and the boys found little either of topography or animal life to make interesting pictures, the party pushed on steadily without any of the customary side expeditions for the purpose of obtaining pictures of animal life.

Kisumu proved to be a surprise, being far from the traditional picture of African town, what with its business buildings of European architecture and its comfortable bungalows where European residents dwelt. One of the lake steamers was in the town and the boys sought and obtained permission to board it for inspection. They were surprised to find it a modern, though small, craft, with comfortable cabins, well-appointed saloons, and electric lights.

"Not much like the Africa we've been through," said Mr. Hampton, "and even less like the Africa into which we soon will plunge. But, then, you fellows must remember that this is a point on the

main travel artery, as the railroad from the distant coast connects here with the boats to carry travellers across the lake and to the northern railroad line. Not far from here, I am told, we'll find the country wild enough, and the people far more primitive than the Kikuyus of the plains."

In the several days spent at Kisumu, while Mr. Hampton was busy restocking for their further journey, the boys knocked about the little town and at the Club to which a friend of Mr. Hampton's living down country in Nairobi had given them cards for use in case they came this way, they made the acquaintance of an Englishman who told them a good deal about the great lake sparkling beyond the town. He was in Kisumu to convalesce from an attack of jungle fever, and quite willing to wile away the slow hours with conversation.

Many stories he told them of the furious storms which, rising with extraordinary rapidity, lash the surface of this second largest lake in the world. For such is Victoria Nyanza, being roughly speaking some 200 miles in length by as many in breadth.

"I was out fishing with a friend one day in a native canoe," he said, "when the blue sky which had been without a cloud suddenly changed to an ominous gray. In the twinkling of an eye, the wind rose and a slashing rain began to fall. We made

with all speed for a neighboring creek to seek shelter. But just as we were about to land we spotted a crocodile concealed among the reeds. I tell you, lads, my heart went pit-a-pat as I thought of what might have occurred if, in our haste, we had leaped ashore before spotting him."

"What happened?" asked the interested Bob.

"Oh, these lake natives are so used to dealing with crocodiles that they are undaunted. We went on a bit farther before landing, and then one of our canoe men sneaked up behind the crocodile and slashed off his tail with a knife. After the monster was thus disabled, for his tail is his most effective weapon, you know, the native finished him off."

"Single-handed and with only a knife?" breathed Frank, round-eyed. "Whew."

Lake Victoria was unknown to the European world until the explorer Speke discovered it in the middle of the last century. Even Stanley on his memorable expedition into the heart of Equatorial Africa had skirted it only a short time before without even suspecting its existence.

While at Kisumu the boys found such relief from the lowlands heat, for Victoria lies 4,000 feet above sea level and the climate of neighboring regions is delightful and salubrious, that they became imbued with renewed energy. They were here, there and

everywhere, poking into everything of interest to be seen. Thus it was that they heard of a fleet of native canoes which would set out the morning of the second day and arose early, along with Niellsen, for the purpose of obtaining a film of the event.

As the day was clear, what promised to be really excellent film was obtained. The canoes were of the simplest construction, being nothing more nor less than hollowed out tree trunks, stoppered at the ends with wooden plugs set in clay.

"Whew," said Frank, addressing Ransome, their English friend, who had come down with them to behold the start of the fishing fleet, "those things may be safe enough. But I, for one, wouldn't care to trust myself in any such craft, especially on this lake which you say is so treacherous."

Ransome shrugged. "They are really good boats," he said. "Even when tossed by a rhinoceros, they seldom capsize."

At the end of the second day, Mr. Hampton announced that not only had their supplies been restocked but also he had obtained the services of new bearers acquainted with the Kavirondo country who would accompany them henceforth. The Kikuyus were to be sent back to Nairobi, where they had been recruited, by train, in accordance with the contract agreement. He had been fortunate in

replacing Wimba as interpreter and "straw boss," by a six-foot Kavirondo named Mabele.

The next day, therefore, the expedition put Kisumu behind and struck into the Kavirondo country, noticing almost at once a marked change in the character of the country, grassy plateaus and plains being replaced by lofty hills and dense forests, while the native life appeared far more primitive than that of the Kikuyus.

It was noted, too, that the natives were none too friendly. When they entered strange villages, tall warriors would crowd around them scowling. And their heavy hide shields and twelve-foot spears created an uneasy impression in the mind of at least one member of the expedition, namely Mr. Hampton. Then, too, it was no unusual matter to look up suddenly while following a native trail through dense forest and behold the eyes of a half-hidden watcher peering from leafy covert, a matter which occurred not once but many times.

"They told me at Kisumu that the Kavirondos were none too friendly, and were resentful of the encroachments of the whites," said Mr. Hampton, in camp one night. "Yet I was assured we would be safe enough. However, I can't understand this continued unfriendliness. We shall have to push ahead without organizing any side expeditions that

would split our forces, until we reach the territory of Chief Ungaba which Mabele tells me is only two days' march away. He is friendly to the whites, and in his territory we can hunt big game with both rifle and camera to our heart's content."

Care was taken not to give offense to the natives, and Mabele was cautioned to warn those of his bearers who were members of Lake Victoria tribes and not Kavirondos to refrain from becoming embroiled in disputes with the native populace. Guard also was maintained at night to prevent trouble. For although Mr. Hampton was of the opinion that the unfriendliness of the natives was not such as would lead them to attack white men so close to the Lake Victoria settlements, yet he suspected that if the natives considered them off guard they would not hesitate to steal whatever they could lay their hands on.

However, they finally reached the village of Chief Ungaba without unpleasant incident. And as they drew near late in the afternoon of a clear day, the chief himself at the head of what looked like the entire population came out to welcome them.

CHAPTER XVII.

OUT FOR A RHINO.

HERE the expedition settled down to the serious business of shooting big game with a camera, while the days insensibly rolled into weeks. For Chief Ungaba and his people were friendly and, as the park-like country with its lofty hills, great stretches of thorn bush and spreading forests comparatively free of underbrush, abounded in game, Mr. Hampton decided to use the village of Ungaba as a base of operations from which side expeditions could be sent out.

Under the tutelage of Niellsen, the boys had developed into excellent motion picture photographers. And whether they lay concealed for days in brush shelters, awaiting the opportunity to film animals coming to a water hole to drink, or whether they crawled for hours along game trails, dragging both rifle and big camera with them, they returned not only with their enthusiasm undampened but also with many feet of film which they felt certain would

prove on development to be amply worth all the effort expended.

That these trips were not without incident goes without saying. Time and again they had narrow escapes, as when Jack on one occasion crawled around a rock with a view to film buffalo feeding in a grassy depression at the base of the hillside, only to find a particularly deadly snake, the mamba, coiled on the sunny side just at the place where he would next have placed his hand. Drawing back with lightning quickness, he drew his revolver and shot the snake. The sound of the shot sent the buffalo tearing and lumbering away and spoiled his chance of getting a picture of them, a chance which he had spent a full hour in acquiring. But he saved his life.

Many weary hours, too, were spent in stalking animals, so that the obtaining of each separate bit of film was an adventure in itself. The common jungle grass retarded progress and its pollen getting into their eyes set up an irritation which half-blinded them. They were never without at least one member of the party suffering from swollen eyes. Anticipating this, however, they had come provided with eye wash for the alleviation of distress. It was the dry season, and they wore only the lightest of clothing, consisting of sleeveless shirt

and knee length pants, "like Boy Scouts," Bob remarked. Consequently, they suffered much from the scratches of various other varieties of grass with barbs, of the tall plumed reeds with stiff leaves which cut like a knife and, especially, from the "cow itch." This latter name they gave a plant having seed pods covered with fine hairs which pierced even through clothing and set up an excruciating itching.

On the whole, however, the hardships were less than they had expected to encounter, and a hot bath in a collapsible tub on the return from a picture-taking expedition went far to make life bearable. Moreover, they had the consolation of piling up thousands of feet of film which they felt assured would be invaluable.

"I can just see the kids sitting in the motion picture house when some of these scenes flash on the screen," said Bob, one night, after returning from a particularly trying expedition upon which eland, giraffes, buffalo, hyenas and adjutant birds had been filmed. "Only we need some more thrilling stuff."

"I should think you'd have gotten enough thrills on that runaway raft to last you the rest of your life," said Niellsen, smoking his pipe on the opposite side of the camp fire. "Just the same, what you say about our films of animal life is true. I won-

der," he added, turning toward Mr. Hampton seated on a camp chair at his shoulder, "whether we couldn't persuade Chief Ungaba to organize a rhinoceros hunt. I have a hunch we'd get a thrill out of that."

"Good idea," approved Jack. "Let's try it."

After some further discussion, it was agreed that the next morning all should wait on Chief Ungaba and prefer their request. Accordingly, they turned in and slept soundly and at an early hour arose and entered the village which lay not far away across an open meadow. Whenever camp was pitched at an African village, the party was careful to locate some distance away, both because the odors of these villages frequently become offensive and to avoid possible friction arising between the native populace and the bearers from alien tribes.

The village was up and astir, and as the boys passed along the main street toward the central square where Chief Ungaba's hut was located they found their interest excited by sights which never became stale. Cooking fires were going outside the mud-walled, thatched-roofed huts, and over them the Kavirondo women with their "tails" were busied preparing breakfast for their lords and masters who still lolled on sleeping mats within or else yawned sleepily at door openings, watching the whites.

These so-called "tails" worn by the women never failed to amuse, and many a hearty laugh had they given the boys. Made of plaited grass and tied to a string about the waist, they fall down behind, and denote the status of the wearer. Little girls wear little ones, engaged girls slightly larger ones, and married matrons the largest of all. As loin cloths comprise practically the only clothing worn by men, women or children, the tribesmen looked as if, said Bob, "they were all ready for a plunge." Some, however, considered themselves well dressed, indeed, for their bodies were smeared with red and white clays, producing an effect which they considered decorative in the extreme but which the boys regarded as particularly ghastly.

Chief Ungaba sitting at the door of his hut was not an especially kinglike object as he knuckled his eyes sleepily. He failed to note their approach at first because of the fact that he was leaning sideways as if to hear without being seen while listening to sounds of high shrill voices raised in altercation within the hut.

"What's going on, I wonder," asked Bob of his companions.

Mr. Hampton laughed heartily. "The chief's wives are hard at it," he said. "They are having their regular morning squabble. Poor man, he has

six first wives, and they lead him a dog's life. He is chief everywhere except in his own house."

Scarcely had he finished speaking than a piercing shriek cut through the clamor of angry voices, followed by another and another. Then a sobbing young woman ran headlong from the hut, clutching her hair, while behind her three older women crowded each other in the doorway. They stared triumphantly until the younger woman disappeared amidst the adjacent huts and then withdrew.

"The old ones kicked the best looking one out," said Niellsen, grinning a little bit. "Well, age has to protect itself. Now that they've banded together to get rid of her, however, they'll probably fall to fighting amongst themselves."

The noisy quarrelling subsided, however, as if by magic, and once more peace reigned in Chief Ungaba's household. The lord and master who had cowered away from the door as if trying to squeeze into the wall, when the fight was carried into the open, now, upon the withdrawal of the women, stood up and stretched his arms wide in a yawn. The boys couldn't repress a laugh, but they smothered it with their hands so as not to let the sound reach his ears.

Then, as Mr. Hampton approached, the chief for the first time became cognizant of their presence,

and a smile of welcome broke over his broad, full-lipped, humorous face.

"A quarrelsome woman is worse than a hyena, and five are enough to defend a town," he said. "My white brother will understand."

He spoke in the Kavirondo tongue, but Mr. Hampton and the boys had been studying the simple language with the aid of their interpreter Mabele, and during their lengthy stay they had acquired a rough working knowledge of it which made the chief's words understandable.

"Chief Ungaba speaks words of wisdom," answered Mr. Hampton, gravely, but with twinkling eye.

And the chief, observing the twinkle, laughed outright.

Thereupon, Mr. Hampton broached the subject of the proposed rhinoceros hunt, to which the chief readily agreed. He was willing enough to lend his warriors for the purpose of beating up the reeds of a nearby marsh, as Mr. Hampton promised him in return the carcass of the slain beast. The high-powered rifles of the Hampton party would prove far more efficient weapons against the tough hide armor of the monster than the bows or spears of the villagers. And the obtaining of fresh meat was

always a consideration. Indeed, there would be a great feast in the village.

Negotiations concluded, the whites returned to camp with the assurance that on the edge of the reedy marsh some two miles west of the village in the middle of the afternoon they would find Chief Ungaba's men awaiting them for the hunt.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON THE RHINO'S PATH.

THAT assurance was fulfilled, for when the Hampton party arrived on the scene tall warriors armed with spears and with clappers for producing a particularly atrocious racket already had spread in a wide circle around the marsh.

Mabele who had preceded them came running up with the intelligence that a huge rhinoceros, the largest seen in that district for a long time, had been observed entering the marsh the preceding night. Although a plains animal, yet it resembles its river-loving brother, the hippopotamus, in its regard for cool damp spots. And this marsh was a noted haunt of the rhinos.

Many acres in extent, the marsh stretched away ahead in an expanse of tall reeds and low trees. And although the boys knew at least two score beaters were converging toward the plain edging the marsh where they had taken their station, yet they could not see them. Now and then, however,

the sound of a clapper could be heard. Nor was there any sign of the rhino.

Three motion picture cameras had been brought along, so as to photograph every phase of the hunt. And Niellsen, Jack and Frank were to operate them. Bob, the best shot of the three boys, and Mr. Hampton constituted the armed hunters of the party. They were not to kill the monster until good pictures had been obtained first of the rhino emerging from the swamp and of the beaters converging upon his lair.

As the most expert of the operators, Niellsen had elected to go into the marsh with his camera and follow up the beaters. And Mr. Hampton accompanied him as his protector. This left the three boys alone in the plain.

It was a morning of blazing sunshine and, early though the hour, the day already had become uncomfortably warm. Frank suffered especially, as he lugged his big camera to a vantage point some distance from Jack so that they would be able to take in the scene from various angles.

"If the rhino charges you, what will you do?" asked Bob, carrying Frank's film box.

"I'm going to run," said Frank. "What d'you think?"

"Doesn't a sense of duty to your employers fill

your breast?" demanded Bob, as if in surprise. "I should think you'd stick on the burning deck and let the rhino charge right over you in order to get a picture of him in action."

"You've got another think coming," replied Frank, coming to a halt and adjusting the tripod. "Guess this is far enough away from Jack."

"But just think," persisted Bob, "of what a gorgeous picture it would make. Imagine sitting in a theatre at home and suddenly seeing a huge rhino come lumbering toward you, as if he were going to charge right out of the screen and into the audience."

"Talk to Jack," said Frank coolly. "I can't hear you. Whoo, it's hot. Wish the battle would begin."

Close at hand in the marsh, as if his words had been a signal, a tremendous uproar of cries broke out interspersed with the rachetting sound of the clappers in the hands of the native beaters.

"Better get ready," advised Bob. "That sounds pretty close."

Frank leaped to his feet, all eagerness, the lassitude of the moment before forgotten, and took his place at the camera.

"See anything yet?" he called.

"No," said Bob. "And I don't hear any shots,

either. So I suppose Jack's father isn't potting away. But what an infernal din those beaters are putting up."

The noise died down, became more remote, and Frank relaxed his tense attitude at the camera, while Bob once more laid down his rifle.

"Huh. Guess the rhino headed for another direction."

"I suppose so," said Frank. "Certainly the beaters are withdrawing."

Once more they were alone on the sunny plain with its tall buffalo grass, alone except for Jack whose head and chest only could be seen above the tall grass some distance away. He waved a hand and they replied similarly, but he was too far away to make himself heard except by shouting and so did not call to them.

Perhaps five minutes had elapsed during which no immediate sounds except the drone of huge flies and the tiny hum of insects broke the somnolent stillness. The boys spoke now and then in low voices, but in the main were silent. Bob's keen glance played continually along the edge of the marsh, but Frank had taken seat on the film box and was sunk in revery.

Suddenly Bob's hand gripped his shoulder, and Bob's voice whispered low:

"Sh. Here he comes."

Frank sprang to his feet and gazed in the direction indicated by Bob.

A huge brute with dark, dun-colored hide had parted the reeds of the marsh not fifty yards away. He stood sideways at the edge of the plain, formidable horned head lifted as if listening to the distant sounds of the beaters.

"He eluded them in some way," whispered Frank. "What a picture."

Swinging the lens of the camera about until he brought the rhino into focus, he began to turn the crank.

The rhino abandoned his listening attitude and, dropping his head, began to move slowly forward on a line bringing him midway between Jack and Frank. Although his legs were short and ponderous, so huge was his body that it towered above the buffalo grass which parted before him like water before a scow.

Over him fluttered a perfect cloud of small birds, like a swarm of bees hiving on a bough. They made continual darts at the huge back, picking off ticks and performing his toilet for him. The boys had heard this phenomenon described, but had never witnessed it, the only rhinos they had seen heretofore being those captives in Zoos.

Now and again as he moved slowly along, the huge beast would lift his head. And at such times he gave the watching, spell-bound boys the impression that he was sniffing the air as if in search of his arch-enemy, man.

Realizing that should the rhino become aware of Jack's presence and charge him, his comrade would be without protection as he had the sole rifle of the outfit, Bob crouching low began making his way to a point in the rear of the rhino where he could afford protection to Jack as well as Frank.

And well it was that he took this precaution. For a time the rhino continued his slow advance on the line which would avoid both boys, stopping occasionally to repeat his gesture of lifting his head as if to sniff. Bob suddenly recalled that, although the day was calm, still there was a bit of breeze blowing, and that it came from Jack's direction. Frank, therefore, was to leeward of the rhino and fairly safe from detection, as the great beast is short-sighted. But Jack was to windward and might be detected.

Remembering what he had heard of rhinos to the effect that they are short-tempered and fearless, Bob hurried the more and presently found himself in the broad trail beaten down by the rhino and not far behind him. Ahead, not twenty yards away, he

could see the grotesque, broad quarters of the beast.

"The thinnest spot in the rhino's armor is immediately behind the foreleg, and that is his most vulnerable spot," Mr. Hampton had said on parting.

Bob remembered. He remembered, too, that the high-powered rifle he carried was guaranteed to shoot a steel-jacketted bullet that would penetrate even rhino hide. And the range was close enough. He breathed more freely, now that he had come to such close quarters. His momentary panic at thought of Jack's danger began to disappear.

Anyhow, he said to himself, the rhino appeared likely to stalk clear out of the picture, without ever spotting the presence of his photographers to either side.

But Bob was mistaken. Suddenly the monster swerved to the right without warning and charged with amazing swiftness directly toward Jack who was not more than thirty yards away. His great head jerked at every lurch.

Bob started running through the grass at a tangent which would place him close to the beast before the latter could arrvie at Jack's post. He cast a glance in Jack's direction, expecting to see the latter pick up his camera and decamp, but was amazed and alarmed to see Jack busily grinding away.

"Great guns," he muttered, "that rhino must be charging directly into the camera. Why doesn't Jack run?"

But Jack continued at his post, and the truth was, as Bob dashing forward in alarm suspected, that in making the most of his wonderful opportunity to obtain a film of the rhino charging head-on he had forgotten for a moment the important consideration of looking out for his own safety.

CHAPTER XIX.

SAVED FROM THE MONSTER.

On came the rhinoceros, and Jack seeing him grow larger and larger in the eye of the camera until his bulk seemed to fill the whole world continued to crank the machine, exulting in the realization that he was obtaining what undoubtedly would be the finest film of the whole expedition to date, perhaps the finest and most thrilling of all including whatever pictures lay in the future.

He was oblivious, in his blazing excitement, of the fact that the rhinoceros was charging directly at him. He could not hear Bob's frenzied cries. He was unaware of Frank running toward him from the background.

When finally, as the rhino came so close that looking into the camera finder Jack could see little more than the huge formidable head with its little eyes inflamed in anger, he realized with a shock that in another minute it would be too late for him to escape.

What was more, all the risk he had run would go for nought, because the great beast would trample the tripod and camera and destroy the film.

Then Jack acted with a speed of which he had not considered himself capable. But what one can do under stress of tremendous excitement is considerable.

Sweeping the legs of the tripod together, he slung the camera over a shoulder and leaped away, not running in the path of the charging rhino, but at a right angle from it.

Seeing his prey escaping, but unable because of his great bulk to halt his mad career in time, the rhino crashed forward. He passed directly over the spot where Jack had been stationed not sixty seconds after he had departed. One foot struck the film box and sent it lurching forward, and another pile driver descended crushing it into the ground.

But that was the end of Mr. Rhino. For ere the great beast could turn to pursue his quarry, Bob's rifle rang out and, drilled through the heart, the monster halted, swayed on his feet, then fell over on his side with a crash that made the very ground tremble.

Jack returning, white-faced now that he began to realize how close had been his escape from a hor-

rible death, could not speak as he wrung big Bob's hand. And the latter was still filled with nervous excitement himself.

They merely looked at each other, hands clasped, trying to grin, with Bob clutching his rifle and Jack his camera, until a rather hysterical cry of "Hold it," from the rear caused them to swing about.

A score of feet away stood Frank, turning the crank of his camera. He stopped and leaving the machine in position approached his comrades.

"Picture of the slain monster and of his near-victim and the latter's saviour exchanging pleasantries," he said.

Then his tone sobered and grabbing Jack by the shoulders, he shook him fondly.

"You good-for-nothing rascal," he said. "I almost died of heart failure when I saw you sticking to your post. From the rear it looked as if the rhino were running right over you. Then I saw you dash away to one side and, believe me, lad, that was the welcomest sight I've ever laid eyes on."

Jack looked apologetic. "Sorry I caused you fellows any worry on my account," he said. "The next time I'll be more careful of your feelings."

"And, oh, yes," added Frank, as they approached the fallen rhinocerous and stood looking at his vast proportions, "I did what looked like a sort of heart-

less thing. Seeing I couldn't be of any use, as I was without a rifle, I put down my camera, which I'd grabbed when running toward you, and started cranking."

"But, say, that's great," cried Jack. "You got some of that charge yourself then, too?"

"I did that," said Frank. "You obtained the picture of the rhino charging head-on. But I got a film of his charge on you, with you sticking to the camera until in another minute he'd have been upon you. And I got Bob running up and firing at the crucial moment, the rhino's fall, and your hand-shake afterwards. Oh, I tell you, I got me some real films."

Temporarily thrown off the trail of the rhino, Mr. Hampton and Niellsen now put in an appearance followed by scores of Chief Ungaba's warriors. And an excited throng it was which gathered around while the boys related their adventure for the benefit of the two white men and Mabele in turn told the crowding blacks what had occurred.

"Well, I guess we've done all we can for today," said Mr. Hampton finally, after the story had been told and Jack had been both scolded for his foolhardiness and congratulated on his lucky escape. "Suppose we return to camp and leave the Kavirondos to skin the rhino and bring in hide and meat."

The three boys readily acquiesced in this decision, as all were so shaken by their experience—Frank and Bob, in fact, suffering more by reason of their fondness for Jack than did the latter himself—that they were glad to depart.

But Niellsen decided to stay behind in order to obtain a film of the skinning and cutting up process. So the four others departed for camp where, after a bath and a change of clothing, they gathered in front of the tent to talk over the day's events and speculate upon the character of the feast which Chief Ungaba would give that night and to which they had been invited. In fact, they were to be the guests of honor.

Presently Jack arose and strolled away again to his tent, Bob calling to him a lazy inquiry as to what he was doing.

"Going to listen-in on the radio," said Jack. He paused a moment before going on. "There's not much to listen to in this part of the world," he said. "But you know that night before last I heard Cape Town. And then, too, there is always the possibility of getting the wireless signals from some of these better class coast boats, even though they are more than a thousand miles away."

"Yes, and the lake steamers, too," supplemented Frank, rising. "I heard one of them carrying on a

lengthy conversation about freight rates the other day with a trader at Entebbe. Seemed the trader chap was a wireles nut and had gone to considerable expense to put in a station."

"You're right except for one thing," said Mr. Hampton. "I heard of that station when at Kisumu. Entebbe is on the northern side of Lake Victoria. And when the trader put in his station, he didn't find it so very expensive, because the British government gave him a subsidy. That might be a valuable outpost in case of trouble with the natives, which some of the Germans who are still lurking in the hinterland might stir up."

As Mr. Hampton ceased, the two boys who had waited for him to finish, started once more for the tent.

A long silence fell between the two left behind. Bob outstretched on a poncho was too comfortable even to talk, and Mr. Hampton was busy posting his "log," as he called the daily record of their travels and adventures.

Presently a sharp call in Jack's voice caused his father to look up, while big Bob who had been almost asleep rolled over and propped himself on an elbow. Jack stood in the doorway of the tent, beckoning.

"Dad, Bob, come here. The radio."

CHAPTER XX.

A CALL FOR HELP.

DISAPPEARING within the tent after his excited exclamations, Jack left two bewildered individuals staring at each other beside the camp fire.

"What in the world can he mean?" wondered Bob, getting to his feet.

"He has heard something over the radio," surmised Mr. Hampton. "From the way he dashed into the tent, in fact, I'd say he's still listening in. Come on, let's investigate."

Hastening across the intervening space, they pushed aside the tent flap, finding the interior lighted by lantern, and discovered Frank seated at the radio with the headpiece clamped to his ears and Jack bending above him.

As they entered they heard Frank speaking into the transmitter say:

"Here he is, Mr. Ransome. Just a minute."

Pulling the headpiece from his ears, Frank proffered it to Mr. Hampton, while getting to his feet.

"What's going on? Who have you?" questioned Mr. Hampton, still bewildered. But at the same time he accepted the proffered instrument, while Jack thrust him into the camp chair vacated by Frank.

"It's the English trader we met at Kisumu," responded Frank. He's calling for you. Says he's called every night for a week over the station at Entebbe where he is now located. But he'll explain. Talk to him."

Pulling the transmitter toward him, Mr. Hampton obediently called "Hello."

Then Bob, unable longer to control his impatience, seized Frank and pulled him outside.

"Now tell me what's going on," he commanded. "I don't want to speak in there for fear of disturbing Mr. Hampton. But what's this all about?"

It had grown appreciably darker in the short interval since Bob had entered the tent, for once the sun goes down in equatorial Africa night comes on apace. But the light of the lantern fell through the opening upon Frank who stood holding back the flap and listening to what Mr. Hampton was saying inside, and this light showed his eyes ablaze with excitement.

He turned to Bob as if reluctant to discontinue trying to hear what the older man seated at the

radio transmitter was saying. Then he grinned at big Bob's exasperation.

"Listen, old thing," he said. "We're in luck."

"Luck?"

"Yes, of the biggest kind. The man on the other end of the line is none other than the Englishman we met at Kisumu."

"Well, what of it? Why don't you tell me what he said?" Big Bob's exasperation at this teasing grew apace.

"He's been calling every night for a week from Entebbe in the hope that we would pick him up. But as you know we haven't been using the radio much, and so we haven't happened to hear him."

"All right," said Bob, his patience thoroughly exhausted. "I heard that. Now will you talk turkey?" And reaching out a big arm, he pulled Frank against his chest and began to knuckle his head with his free hand in the familiar fashion known as administering the "Dutch rub."

"Ouch. Leggo, you big bully," gasped Frank.

"Will you talk straight?"

"Uh-huh."

Bob released him. "Now speak up," he said belligerently, "or who knows what'll happen to you?"

"He wants us to go with him to the Mountains of the Moon?"

"Are you trying to——"

Frank backed off, laughing, hands held up defensively in front of him.

"No, I'm not trying to kid anybody," he said.

"Well, what's this 'Mountains of the Moon' stuff, then?"

"Not the Moon in the sky, Bob," said Frank. "But a mountainous district in the Belgian Congo constituting the very heart of Africa."

"Oh." Bob was mollified, but still puzzled. "What for?"

"There are active volcanoes over there, and Mr. Ransome says they are reported by native rumors reaching Entebbe to be in eruption. He's going in and says he thought we might want to go along."

Bob felt his interest quickened. Volcanoes in active eruption. That would be something like a sight worth travelling hundreds of miles to see. "Fine," he cried enthusiastically. "What wonderful picture stuff."

Frank nodded. "That's what I thought of the first thing, too."

"But what is Mr. Ransome going in for?" asked Bob.

"Oh, I suppose these fellows who knock about

the wilds like to take in the sights as well as we who don't live here all the time."

"Maybe so," agreed Bob. Then, as a new thought occurred to him, he asked: "How soon could we get to Entebbe? And how much farther does this volcanic region lie?"

Frank confessed ignorance regarding the answers to both questions.

"Come on, let's go back inside," he said, "now that your curiosity is satisfied. You know as much about it now as I do. Let's see what Mr. Hampton has to say."

The latter concluded his conversation with "That's agreed then and we'll start tomorrow," as the boys re-entered the tent, and from Jack who had remained at his father's shoulder burst a loud "Hurray."

"Are we going?" cried Frank eagerly.

Mr. Hampton nodded, and Jack shouted, "First thing in the morning."

"Fine," cried Bob. "I was about fed up with this district, anyway. Not enough excitement."

Mr. Hampton looked grave.

"You'll get enough of that where we're going," he said.

"Anything beside volcanoes?" queried Bob, struck by something in the older man's tone.

"Ransome said there was some unrest amongst the natives," Mr. Hampton replied, after a pause. "He seems to believe some of the German officials driven out of East Africa are at the bottom of it, although he said there was no evidence of any such thing. All the native reports, he said, laid the trouble-making at the door of a new medicine man who has appeared in the devastated areas and is known as 'The Prophet.' I couldn't, of course, gain a very comprehensive survey of the situation during our rather brief conversation. But I did find out that this medicine man has gathered considerable of a following about him."

"Won't it be dangerous?" asked a voice from the doorway, and they turned to find Niellsen standing there. So engrossed had all inside the tent been that they had failed to note his approach.

He put down his motion picture camera and pulling a camp chair toward him sank into it with a sigh of weariness.

"I gathered enough to understand a trip to some place which might become hot for us is under discussion," he said. "What about it?"

Mr. Hampton explained, adding: "Like you, I'm afraid it may be too dangerous to undertake. At least, that is," he added hastily to forestall the remonstrances which all three boys looked prepared

to make, "we can go part of the way. Certainly, into the volcanic region. But whether we push on amongst the disturbed tribes where this medicine man, The Prophet, is supposed to be operating will have to depend on circumstances."

The faces of the three boys grew bright again.

"Oh, of course," agreed Jack, quickly.

"But what I can't understand," added Bob, harking back to the question he had earlier propounded to Frank, "is why this chap Ransome is going in. Does he have plenty of money and time to go running around like this? And why did he call us and ask us to go along? Why has he been waiting at Entebbe for a week, trying to get us, instead of setting out?"

Mr. Hampton knew more than he was prepared to state. Had the boys but known, which they did not, they would have suspected as much from the fact that at Kisumu he had been in closest conversation for more than an hour with Ransome, the ostensible invalid trader, in a locked room at the Club. But of that conference they were unaware. This much, however, he did state:

"I believe him to be a secret agent of the British government, fellows. And, although the Mountains of the Moon lie in Belgian territory, yet Great Britain is vitally interested in anything which may

tend to upset conditions amongst the natives. As to his reasons for wishing us to accompany him, it is possible that Mr. Ransome wants us to act as a cloak for him."

"I see," said Frank. "You mean that if we go in to take motion picture records of events, he can go along as a member of the expedition without arousing suspicion as to his real status?"

"Exactly," said Mr. Hampton, nodding his head in approval.

"Time to go to the celebration of Chief Ungaba," spoke a voice at the tent flap as Mr. Hampton concluded.

All turned about hastily. As in the case of Niellsen's approach, they had been unaware of anyone present.

It was Mabele, the interpreter who had been employed at Kisumu. He stood in a respectful attitude, holding up the tent flap, but not venturing to enter the tent.

"All right, Mabele," said Mr. Hampton, shortly. "We'll come at once."

Silently, the black dropped the flap and withdrew. After a moment, Mr. Hampton arose and crossing the tent lifted the flap and stared into the moonlit darkness. Then he let it fall and turned around.

"He's gone," he said. "Now I wonder how much he heard."

"Oh, I guess he just came at that minute," said Niellsen, easily. "Anyway, what does it matter?"

Mr. Hampton shook his head. "I don't know as it matters at all," he replied, thoughtfully. "But that fellow is a man of superior parts. He's smart. I wonder——"

Then he shook himself and smiled.

"No matter," he said. "Niellsen, there's a bit of food in the ice box which we saved for you. Eat it, and then let's get under way for the village. We'll have to stay a little while, in order not to hurt the chief's feelings. But we'll leave before the party becomes too boisterous, so that we can make an early start tomorrow. We have a good five days of travel ahead of us before we can reach Entebbe."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE RADIO STOLEN.

CHIEF UNGABA'S party promised to be like several other similar functions to which the boys and Mr. Hampton had been bidden as guests by other friendly chiefs. For when they arrived, they found the select two dozen guests of the chief already seated in a circle around a huge iron cauldron filled with foaming, milky, African beer, while farther off in the village square blazed a number of fires around which the village proletariat were gathered to eat the meat of the rhino and drink their home brewed liquor.

Places were made for Mr. Hampton and the boys in the circle about Chief Ungaba's select cauldron. And each was provided with a pliant length of hollow cane. Every guest had such a "straw," and these they dipped into the cauldron at frequent intervals, sucking through them great mouthsful of beer.

Let it be said at once, so that there may be no

misconception, that Mr. Hampton, Niellsen and the boys did not indulge. Too well they knew that outright refusal would wound the feelings of the chief deeply, and would bring down upon their heads such a weight of displeasure that their stay in the region undoubtedly would be only short-lived. Therefore, they accepted the straws and even rested them in the cauldron, but without drinking.

This deception, however, was not discovered. For already the party had been in progress more than an hour, and the guests were becoming uproarious and were little likely to pay much attention to the white visitors.

At frequent intervals one or other of the guests would leap to his feet and begin to dance around the circle, lifting his knees high and prancing. More and more often the performer of the moment would not confine himself to dancing, but would also burst into song.

A wild scene it made, as the light of the cooking fires in the square played ruddily on the mud walls of the huts nearby and the thatched roofs circular and running up to a peak from which projected the long center pole of the dwelling. And for a time the boys found this picture of primitive men indulging in a celebration rather fascinating.

But before long the dancers and singers became

so wild in their bearing that it became evident they would soon descend into a bestial orgy, and the boys found it difficult to keep their disgust from showing on their faces. Presently Mr. Hampton whispered to Jack, who sat nearest him, and who in turn passed the word to the others, that he considered it time to withdraw. Which they did without further ado, making their way out of the circle without attracting the attention of the Kavirondos.

As they passed Chief Ungaba, however, Mr. Hampton paused to converse with him, and the chief got unsteadily to his feet. When informed that the whites planned to leave at an early hour the next morning, he displayed sincere regret. And after finding his pleas that they remain with him a while longer prove of no avail, he promised to be on hand to see them depart.

As they returned to their tent, Mr. Hampton commented sorrowfully upon the failure of civilization to penetrate the wilds and break down bestial customs by providing the natives with better things.

"Some day, of course, it will come," he said, as they reached the boys' tent, "but as yet civilization has not gone very far into the African wilds."

Saying goodnight, he and Niellsen passed on toward their own tent, a-gleam in the moonlight a short distance beyond, while the boys lifted the

flap and went in, Jack who led first shooting the rays of his pocket flashlight inside—a precaution which they never failed to observe when entering a dark tent in order to discover whether snakes had taken possession in their absence.

No snakes were to be seen. But as the rays of the flashlight passed over the various objects of the interior, Jack uttered a cry of dismay.

"What's the matter?" demanded Frank, at his shoulder.

Disappearing into the tent without replying, Jack found and lighted a lantern. Then he turned to his two comrades who had pressed after him, and swinging the lantern so that its rays fell into the corner where their little radio station had been set up, he pointed.

"Gone," he said.

"Gone," echoed Bob and Frank, as with one voice, in a tone of stupefaction.

It was true. Where their radio set had stood was now nothing but bare space.

For a moment or two, all three boys were too bewildered to speak. All they could do was to stare.

Then Bob became energized, and sprang for the tent flap.

"Where are you going?" demanded Frank.

"To tell Mr. Hampton," Bob replied.

"Let's see what else is missing first. Evidently there's been a thief here."

Bob turned back and helped in the rapid inspection of the tent. None of their possessions was missing except the radio.

"Funny a Negro should take that," mused Jack, as they looked at each other in growing puzzlement. "Most of them who have seen us use it look on it as a white man's magic and wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole."

"I'll say it's funny," said Bob darkly. "Do you know what I think?"

"No. What?"

Bob looked around and lowering his voice drew his two comrades toward him while he whispered:

"Mabele."

Jack looked at him in stupefaction. But Frank's alert eyes displayed complete understanding, and he nodded emphatically.

"That's it. Remember what your father said, Jack, when he discovered Mabele at least had been in a position to overhear us discussing Mr. Ransome and the trouble amongst the natives in that Mountains of the Moon region, whether he actually had heard anything or not?"

"That's right," said Jack. And now his glance grew worried. "Let's tell father at once."

"You tell him," said Bob. "I'll go over to the bearers' camp and see whether Mabele is around."

"You aren't afraid?"

"Huh." Bob tapped his ever-ready automatic. "Besides, we mustn't lose any time on this. My opinion is that the beggar's decamped. If he has, we'll want to pick up his trail as soon as possible."

"But what in the world would he steal the radio for?" asked Frank.

"I don't know," said Bob. "But we can puzzle over that later. The first thing is to find out if our suspicions that it was he are correct."

"You're right, Bob," said Frank. "And I'll go with you, for on a job of this kind two are better than one. Jack in the meantime can carry word to his father and Niellsen."

CHAPTER XXII.

MABELE DISAPPEARS.

WHILE Jack hastened away toward the tent shared by the two others, Bob and Frank made their way toward where a blazing camp fire marked the encampment of the seventy-five bearers.

Few of the latter could be seen, not more than a dozen. Could the others have decamped? Had they, perhaps, departed with Mabele? The boys hurried forward, alarm knocking within. But when one of the dozen blacks outstretched near the fire got to his feet on being addressed in the bush English of which all had a smattering, he informed Bob that his comrades had gone to the village to participate in the celebration.

As that was to be expected, Bob's anxieties in a measure subsided. But when he asked whether Mabele had accompanied the party the man shook his head in denial.

"Mabele him not go 'long," he said. "No see Mabele long time."

Quick inspection of the recumbent figures showed Mabele not of the number, and convinced nothing as to his whereabouts was to be learned of their informant the boys turned away. As they passed near the boxes and bales of supplies and of equipment of one sort or another, over which tarpaulins were lashed to protect them from storms, Frank was seized with an idea.

Halting, he laid a hand on Bob's arm.

"Have we ever used the spare radio transmitting apparatus on this trip out from Kisumu?" he demanded.

Bob scratched his head.

"I don't know. Seems to me the last time we had occasion to use it was when our runaway raft grounded on that island in the river. And that was before we reached Kisumu."

"That's my recollection, too," said Frank, in a tone of satisfaction. "Come on, let's find Mr. Hampton and the others."

He started forward again, and as Bob fell into pace beside him, making for their tent before which they could observe a bobbing lantern in the grip of an unseen hand, Bob demanded:

"What made you ask that about the spare radio?"

"Oh, I just thought that if we hadn't ever unpacked it, Mabele wouldn't know it was there."

"Right," said Bob, comprehension dawning. "In that case, we won't be hamstrung."

They were close enough now to see the lantern was borne by Jack and that Mr. Hampton and Niellsen accompanied him.

"Did you find him?" asked Jack as they approached.

"No," answered Frank, "nor did we find many of the bearers. Most of them have gone to the village to take part in the celebration."

Mr. Hampton groaned. "I had expressly forbidden Mabele to let the men depart," he said. "The rascal violated my orders in order to have a clear field for his operations."

Passing inside the tent, Mr. Hampton and Niellsen took their turn at staring at the spot where the radio apparatus had stood, as if by the mere fact of their glances they could conjure it back into place.

"Then you, too, believe it was Mabele, Mr. Hampton?" asked Bob.

The older man nodded.

"I hardly knew what I suspected when he appeared at the tent today and it seemed likely he had overheard what was being said. But this has clarified my suspicions. He's a shrewd one, a man as I said of superior parts. I am of the opinion now

that he's in the pay of the trouble-makers in this part of the world, be they German or what. Doubtless he thought that by taking the radio apparatus he could cut us off from communication with Ransome."

"And at the same time, perhaps, communicate with his confederates," suggested Frank.

"It's a serious loss, all right enough," said Mr. Hampton. "And, furthermore, by allowing the bearers to attend the village celebration he increases his opportunity for escape. The villagers will be pretty loggy in the morning, and in no condition to help us pick up Mabele's trail. And now the bearers will be the same. He will be able to get a good start."

Sinking into a camp chair, he stared contemplatively at the ground, and the others respected his silence.

"Moreover," he resumed, "we have no means now of notifying Ransome that Mabele stands betrayed in his true light. The rascal can get to Entebbe ahead of us in the assurance that we have no way of informing on him. And he may be able to cause no end of trouble."

Frank stepped forward eagerly.

"But, Mr. Hampton, we have the spare radio packed away. We haven't used it for so long a

time that it's no wonder you have forgotten about it. But that's probably our salvation. For we haven't used it at any time during Mabele's connection with our party, and so it's unlikely that he knew we had it."

"Good for you, Frank," said Mr. Hampton, jumping up, the lines of worry disappearing as if by magic. "Let's have a look. Bring that lantern, Jack, and we'll investigate."

Forebearing to summon any of the bearers to aid them, the boys themselves overhauled the heap of supply cases and from the midst pulled the familiar case enclosing the spare transmitting set. Many were their expressions of satisfaction.

Carrying it back to the tent, they opened it up. All the parts were complete. And in another and smaller case was packed the aerial. Assembling and setting up would be a short enough matter, but Mr. Hampton suggested that they wait until the morning. For one thing, he felt certain they would be unable to receive any response from Entebbe at this hour.

"And, besides," he pointed out, "there is little likelihood now that we shall be able to start tomorrow. None of the bearers who went to the village has returned as yet, and they will be feeling so badly in the morning, after heavy potations of that

native beer, that it would be impossible to get any work out of them. Perhaps, by noon, we can make a start. But even that is problematical. At any rate, you fellows will have plenty of time in which to set up your radio and open communication with Entebbe."

Upon this understanding, Mr. Hampton and Niellsen were once more about to retire for the night to their own tent, when Jack becoming seized with a new idea again halted them.

He wanted to know whether his father did not consider it would be wise to place a guard over their supplies. So friendly was Chief Ungaba that they had felt an unwonted sense of security from thefts during the weeks spent under his protection. For dire, indeed, had been the punishment he had desired to visit upon the one and only thief caught during their stay. In fact, he had wanted to put the poor fellow to death, and he would have done it, too, had it not been for Mr. Hampton's representations.

"You see tonight, Dad," explained Jack, "all the villagers will be stupid with liquor, and the bearers, too. It just occurred to me that, perhaps, Mabele has a number of malcontents amongst the bearers who will follow him. If that's the case, they can make a rich haul and escape easily enough, if they

wait until we retire and then raid the supplies while the rest of the camp is incapacitated by too much party."

"You are right, Jack," answered his father, "and I should have thought of that myself. However, it's not too late. Let's see. There are five of us. If we all go over to the supplies and sleep tonight around a campfire, taking turn and turn about at standing watch, that would be the best way except for one thing. It would leave our tents unguarded again. No, that won't do. What can anybody suggest?"

"Oh, I guess one man would be enough to stand guard," said Bob. "They'd hardly try any tricks, if they found we were on our toes about the matter."

"A good thing we took our rifles with us," said Frank. "If they had been stolen, then we would have been out of luck. Why, they could just pot us one after the other."

"On second thought," said Mr. Hampton, "I don't believe it will be necessary to guard the supplies ourselves. If Mabele had any of the men with him, they'd have stolen our things during our absence, just as he took the radio. The fact that nothing but the radio was stolen indicates to me that he was operating alone. No, we'll chance his stealing

from us. He couldn't get much, anyway. But I will put several of those older men who stayed in camp and refused to disobey orders on guard. They're steady fellows, and will afford sufficient protection. Isn't there one of them, Bob, who you told me understands a revolver?"

"Yes, that fellow Samba. He used to be a British colonial soldier."

"The one we were talking to tonight?" asked Frank.

"The same," said Bob. "By the way, Mr. Hampton, he'd be a good man to make 'straw boss' now that Mabele has left."

"Right you are," said Mr. Hampton. "Suppose you step over and call him."

Bob readily complied, Frank again accompanying him. They found Samba and his mates sunk in slumber. Nor had the bearers who had gone to the village yet returned. Samba was awakened, and followed them back to the tent.

Mr. Hampton told him that Mabele was a thief and had run away after first disobeying orders by letting all the bearers who wanted to do so go to the village celebration. Then he promised to elevate Samba to Mabele's post. After that he armed him with a revolver, laying strict injunctions on him

that he was not to use it except in case of attack, and sent him to guard the supplies the balance of the night.

The stalwart black's eyes gleamed as, after first handling the weapon in a manner which showed he was accustomed to it, he thrust it into his waist band holding up a long pair of cotton trousers.

"Me un'erstan', sar," he said. And giving a smart military salute, he clicked his bare heels, or rather brought them together with a thud. Then he spun about and went out.

"A good man," said Mr. Hampton. "How'd you learn about him, Bob?"

The big fellow grinned.

"Oh, you know how," he said. "I can't explain it. But I expect I have a faculty for making friends."

Such a faculty, indeed, Bob had. And it is an invaluable one. He was sometimes described by Frank fondly as "the original democrat." "That boy," Frank would say on such occasions, "makes friends with every Tom, Dick and Harry he meets. He never draws any social or color lines. Just interested in people from the human side, I suppose."

Mr. Hampton smiled and shook his head slightly. Then yawning mightily, he arose.

"Well, Niellsen, we may as well retire. Tomorrow will be a big day."

CHAPTER XXIII.

ON TO ENTEBBE.

CAMP presented a scene of strange activity the next day when Mr. Hampton forced his sodden bearers to the task of preparing for departure. During their lengthy stay many articles of equipment had been unpacked, and there was much to do beside striking the tents and packing up the articles they contained.

The task was made easier for Mr. Hampton, however, by reason of the efforts of Samba, who took his new honors as "straw boss" seriously, and who moreover was ably supported in spurring on the laggards by the dozen steadier men who had refused to leave camp the night before and go to Chief Ungaba's beer party.

Nothing untoward had occurred during the night as in little groups supporting each other the guilty bearers had stolen back from the village where revelry continued until dawn.

"Mabele him no got any fella-boys with him,"

Samba had reported in the morning. "All fella-boys him come back."

That had been one comfort to Mr. Hampton in the situation, as without all his bearers he would have been forced to abandon much of his impedimenta. And as the load had not decreased through the using up of supplies, but had been maintained at a steady level by reason of the addition of animal skins, every bearer was needed.

While all this was going on, Bob, Frank and Niellsen doing everything possible to be of aid, Jack devoted himself to the task of opening communication with Entebbe. The previous night in his conversations with Mr. Hampton, Ransome speaking from Entebbe had been extremely careful to speak only in the most guarded terms regarding the trouble amongst the natives west of Lake Victoria. Much that he had told the boys afterwards, concerning Ransome's probable connection with the British secret service, constituted Mr. Hampton's deductions rather than anything which had been said openly over the radio. From this, the Hampton party drew the conclusion that Ransome suspected there might be one or more secret radio stations maintained in the region about them, and was taking no chances on being overheard. Therefore, when finally he did raise Entebbe, and got Mr. Ransome

summoned to the phone, Jack exercised extreme care not to let slip anything which might be seized upon to advantage by hostile ears, yet at the same time to make his meaning perfectly clear.

"I understand," Ransome responded finally. "I shall keep an eye out for your messenger Mabele."

And from the tone employed, Jack felt assured that Ransome would, indeed, keep an eye out for Mabele. In fact, if he did not go further and send out scouts to lay Mabele by the heels before he could reach the conspirators employing him, Jack thought he would be very much mistaken.

In this, however, he was mistaken, as later events proved. For when after an uneventful journey of five days, during which no trace of Mabele had been discovered, the Hampton party did reach Entebbe, on the northern shore of Lake Victoria, they found that Ransome had not caused Mabele's arrest, although having obtained traces of him. On the contrary, he had permitted him to continue at large.

"And the reason was," he explained in a conversation with Mr. Hampton, to which the boys and Niellsen were admitted, "that I thought it better to let him keep his freedom, in order that he might lead us, perhaps, to his employers. I have him under constant surveillance. And the last word I had from a spy put on his tracks and sent back

to me by native runner was that he was working his way around the shores of the lake."

He paused, smiling with satisfaction. "Perhaps," he resumed, "we'll be able to cut him off at Masaka, on the western shore of the lake, to which we'll cross from here, in order to save time in striking for the Mountains of the Moon. He travelled faster than you and slipped into Entebbe two days ago. My men apprised me of his coming, and when he departed secretly, I sent a couple of keen fellows, smart blacks and born trackers with a considerable knowledge of the dialects of tribes about the northern and western shores of the lake, in pursuit."

From this it can be gathered that Ransome no longer kept up in the presence of the boys his pretense of being a trader. And such, indeed, was the case. Informed bluntly by Mr. Hampton that the boys were too smart to be kept in darkness but would have pierced his secret of their own intuitions, and that consequently he had considered it wise to put them in possession of some of the facts, Ransome had called the boys and Niellsen to him and had laid all his cards on the table, so to speak.

"I am an Englishman," he had concluded, "working in the interests of my government. I may be mistaken, therefore, in believing that those interests

are best for the progress of civilization in these wilds. That is for others to decide. But, at least, I want you boys to believe that we honestly are endeavoring to do our best for the natives. And I can't say as much for the former officials of German East Africa whom I suspect of being behind this trouble in the Congo. If the trouble becomes serious, we shall have to go to the aid of Belgium, and that is the reason I want to go in and see how matters stand for myself. You people will be able to protect me from detection, unless Mabele eludes my trackers and escapes us to carry word to the conspirators that I am not what I seem. In that case, of course, the danger to you all will become real. Otherwise, you will be merely explorers, picturing wild game and scenery in the real heart of Africa."

"I want to be of aid," Mr. Hampton had said, "yet I do not want to bring the boys into danger, nor imperil the trophies of our expedition. All that we have taken to date, of course, both film records of primitive and wild game life and trophies of the hunt, are either already at Nairobi or will be despatched thither from here. So they will be safe enough. But further records might be destroyed should we be attacked in the Mountains of the Moon. As I say, I do not want to imperil either the results of the expedition or the lives of the boys.

If at Masaka we find that Mabele has escaped us and has the chance to carry word to his conspirators of your real identity, Ransome, I shall probably deem it wise to turn back."

"If you do so, under those circumstances, I shan't blame you," Ransome had said. "But," he had added confidently, "I am quite certain Mabele cannot escape us. I have him, so to speak, in my clutch all the time, and am permitting him at large merely that he may lead us to his employers, the men higher up."

"It is, of course, quite possible," Mr. Hampton had added, after a thoughtful pause, "that Mabele did not gain sufficient knowledge of your identity from my remarks to the boys which I feel assured he overheard, that night in the tent, to make him dangerous to you and us."

"Possible, but not probable," Mr. Ransome had said. "Otherwise, why did he steal your radio immediately afterwards, except to thwart further communication between us? And why is he striking straight for the disturbed area?"

CHAPTER XXIV.

PLANS TO CAPTURE THE PROPHET.

At Masaka, a small trading center on the western shore of Lake Victoria, they met with disappointment. For the two native trackers put on the trail of Mabele by Mr. Ransome appeared the first night after their arrival with the news that their quarry had managed to elude them.

They had seen him enter a lake village one night, where he found shelter in a native hut. And believing him safe for the night, they themselves had done likewise, for they had spent several strenuous days sticking to his trail through broken country of hill and marsh and were exhausted.

Arising early the next day, however, they had discovered on investigation that Mabele had slipped away. And cautious inquiry developed that a native canoe also was missing. Putting two and two together, they had come to the conclusion that Mabele had taken to the lake. Although they believed they had kept out of his sight all the way and had given him no suspicion of their presence, yet it was likely

he suspected he was being trailed and had taken to the lake to shake off pursuit.

Their one consolation was that an hour or two after their discovery of Mabele's flight one of the sudden storms for which Lake Victoria is noted had arisen, accompanied by rolling thunder, lightning and a swishing downpour of rain. Later in the day, after the storm had departed and the waters of the lake had subsided, a native fisherman had brought in the stolen canoe which had been found overturned and floating a mile out from shore. It was their belief, therefore, that Mabele had been drowned. And as on their journey from that point to Masaka they had inquired of every native encountered if a man had been picked up in the lake or had been observed coming to shore, without result, they were confirmed in this belief.

"I don't know about that," said Mr. Hampton thoughtfully, in talking the matter over in a general conference later. "He may have managed to reach shore without being observed. And in that case he is on his way to his confederates with word of our coming to the disturbed regions with you, Ransome, as a spy and not merely a member of our exploring and picture-taking party. However, the boys feel so strongly that they want to proceed

that I shall chance it. We must all be very much on our guard, however."

"Bully for you, Dad," said Jack, enthusiastically. "We can take care of ourselves, never fear. We've been in tight fixes before, you know."

"Yes, I know," sighed Mr. Hampton, half-humorously, as he regarded his strapping son and the two other boys with a twinkle blending affection and respect. "But every time you get there you add to my bowed shoulders and gray hairs."

As Mr. Hampton was as straight and lithe as any of the boys, while his thick hair showed little signs of the advance of age, everybody laughed. A laugh in which he, too, joined.

"But what I'd like to know," said Bob, after the laughter had subsided, "is what Mabele did with our radio set. He couldn't have carried it far alone, and so far as we have been able to discover he had nobody with him."

"It's a puzzle," said Frank. "But he must have hidden it, intending to return for it later, somewhere near Chief Ungaba's village. At any rate, the report of his trackers that he was never observed to have that cumbersome piece of baggage with him is satisfactory in one respect. For it means that he was unable in all likelihood to communicate by radio with the enemy, supposing them

to have a secret radio station as Mr. Ransome suspects.

Several days the party spent at Masaka, completing the purchase of supplies to add to their baggage which had been shipped from Entebbe, and in recruiting a new corps of bearers, one hundred in number. A guard of a dozen trusty fellows in the pay of Mr. Ransome, every one of whom knew how to handle a rifle or revolver, appeared mysteriously from somewhere. And into this number Samba was recruited to his great delight.

"A mighty satisfactory man to have around," was Mr. Hampton's dictum, and accordingly Mr. Ransome took him into the force.

"We'll need the guards, perhaps," he said. "And I have obtained a permit from the Belgian authorities for them to carry arms. Our own permits as hunters also have been obtained, so now everything is settled."

Then the party set out for the Mountains of the Moon, lying around Lake Kivu to the west and south. This gem-like lake is in the real heart of Africa, and to get there it was necessary to travel more than three hundred miles west by south. Kivu lies about one hundred and fifty miles west of the southern extremity of Lake Victoria, and between Lakes Edward and Tanganyika.

Day after day the miles were put behind them without any incidents of especial note. Pictures were taken at times, when the occasion warranted. But for several reasons both Mr. Ransome and his hosts were eager to reach the mysterious Mountains of the Moon which stand sentinel over the unexplored heart of the Dark Continent, and so little time was spent in picture-taking, any secured being obtained on the march, so to speak.

For one thing, Mr. Ransome was eager to gain the region about Lake Kivu and the Mountains of the Moon in order to learn as quickly as possible what was afoot amongst the natives, as disquieting rumors every now and again reached them of The Prophet's activities. Evasive though these rumors were, it became increasingly apparent that The Prophet was someone of powerful personality who had obtained a great hold on the superstitious minds of the natives and who, if given sufficient time, might be able to unite the warlike and remote tribes under one head and cause serious trouble for the whites by swooping down on their scattered settlements and destroying even the railroad and steamship lines and other slim evidences of civilization in the Lake Victoria region which had been built up laboriously through the years.

For another, Mr. Hampton was anxious to reach

the volcanic region while the craters, of which native report was more definite than regarding the activities of The Prophet, were still in eruption. A pictorial record of them would be something never before obtained and valuable in proportion. Besides, the great mountain region was reputed to be the home not only of elephants, buffalo, bush buck, cheetahs, leopards and lions, but also of the ferocious man-apes or gorillas.

To bag specimens of these animals both by gun and by camera would be the crowning achievement of the expedition.

Therefore, the party did not delay on the way but made each day's march as long as possible. The more so were they content to do this as, after passing Kabale, a tiny frontier post in the mountains of Uganda, two weeks from Masaka, they entered a desolate volcanic region which had been laid waste by eruptions of lava in 1912 where little game was encountered.

By day, in fact, this region was plunged into a silence so uncanny as to affect the nerves of even the boys. For they were accustomed in their travel through central Africa to hear the jungle alive about them. Here long distances were covered where not even the hum of an insect or the call of a bird was to be heard. It was, in fact, as if they were passing

through a dead region where even the ground beneath them was devoid of life.

Neither man nor animals were encountered, and glad, indeed, was every member of the party when at length they came to the edge of the mighty African Rift Valley and beheld below them the vast Mfumbiro Plain with craters breaking up the contour in every direction.

This was the region of the volcanoes, and after glimpsing smoking peaks in the distance all day as they approached, the boys now beheld from the edge of a precipice, below which was spread the great plain, three towering cones with smoke-wreathed summits. Whereas only occasional glimpses had been obtained heretofore, they now could observe the mountains from base to summit.

Never had any of them beheld a more awe-inspiring sight. And standing on the edge of a precipice which fell steeply away a matter of two thousand feet to the plain below, with those three smoking cones against the red sunset sky in the distance, they were speechless.

Presently, however, the necessity for making camp for the night appealed to Mr. Hampton, who called the boys away. Some distance back from the precipice, amidst the hard-wood trees of a small grove, where a spring of fresh sweet water burst

from the ground to go tumbling down the rocks, the tents were set up and the bearers were disposed below, along the edge of the little stream.

"Tomorrow," announcd Mr. Hampton, as they sat about the camp fire that night, "we shall descend into the plain. There are numerous villages down there, and on the very slopes of the great volcanoes, inhabited by warlike natives, so we must go prepared to cope with trouble, should the natives prove hostile.

"Mr. Ransome," he added, looking to the other for confirmation, "believes we shall find some trace of The Prophet amongst those natives, as it is in this region he is reputed to be stirring up trouble. I may as well tell you fellows now as later that our friend intends, if possible, to capture The Prophet and spirit him out of the country. With his twelve trusted men that may not be impossible of accomplishment. And as innocent takers of pictures and hunters of big game, we shall be able, perhaps, to turn aside suspicion and cover his tracks.

"Of course," he added, "in setting out on this expedition, we had no intention of being drawn into a political situation. But finding that we can be of vital service, the only decent thing we can do is to proffer our aid. And I'm glad to see from

the way you fellows nod your heads that you agree with me.

"Mr. Ransome," he continued, "already has despatched two of his most trustworthy men, with orders to make their way down the mountainside and into the plain and to the nearest village. Their object is to find out if possible where The Prophet has his headquarters at present. And Mr. Ransome tells me that from conversations between his men and the inhabitants of the last village through which we passed earlier today, there is reason to believe this disturber of the peace is not far away, perhaps in the very village to which he has sent his spies. If the men report early tomorrow that such is the case, Mr. Ransome intends to have a try at his capture. Have I stated matters correctly?" he concluded, glancing toward the tall, thoughtful-faced Englishman whose fortitude and constant good spirits had endeared him to the boys.

"Righto," responded the latter, knocking out his straight-stemmed briar pipe, from which seemingly he was inseparable, and gazing thoughtfully into the bowl. "But you haven't yet told the lads what part they will be asked to play, if they will."

"I was coming to that," said Mr. Hampton. Then turning toward the interested trio, he resumed:

"Two things will be vitally necessary to the suc-

cessful execution of our plans, once The Prophet is located. Both involve you fellows. What they are you will gather as I go along.

"In the first place The Prophet undoubtedly has secured whatever hold he has on the superstitious natives of these regions by playing upon those very superstitions. That he is a white man and a scientist, or at least possessed of scientific information, is deducable from the way in which he has set about winning the awed regard of the natives, according to the reports obtained at our last stop today.

"By that I mean that he knows the way of volcanoes and has drawn upon that knowledge to predict events which have come to pass.

"His first appearance was just prior to the beginning of the recent volcanic eruptions, overflows of lava which have since continued at intervals. And the way in which he appeared to the natives, as we got the story today, was descending the slope of Mount Muhavura afoot at dusk and surrounded by a nimbus of flame. That is easily accounted for in our eyes. Undoubtedly, he had rubbed himself with phosphorus.

"But as he came seemingly from the cloud-wreathed summit of Muhavura, where the natives believe heaven to lie, his statement that he was an immortal from the company of the gods won wide

belief. He prophesied that Muhavura, long silent except for occasional faint rumblings, would overflow in three days. And, behold, it came to pass. Now we know that a man of science, if he had managed to obtain observations of the rise and fall of lava in the crater over a period of days, could predict accurately when the overflow would come. Doubtless, this fellow had taken such observations, and then had utilized his knowledge to further his own ends. For he predicted this would come to pass as a punishment upon the natives for permitting the whites to encroach upon their domain.

"Since that time, it seems, he has gone up and down the Mfumbiro Plain, received everywhere amongst the natives with the profoundest of awe. Sometimes he will ascend the slopes of one of the great cones, Sabinio, Namlagira beneath which the natives believe hell to lie; Muhavura or Mgahinga. Always he forbids the natives to follow him on pain of being seized by the spirits. And when he returns, wrapped in his nimbus of fire, he generally predicts an eruption of lava which quite generally is fulfilled. As I say, that is easy enough for a man of science, but the impression it makes on the native minds may easily be comprehended.

"In fact," said Mr. Hampton, "at that last village, although it is not in the Mfumbiro Plain and no

member has yet seen The Prophet, yet his influence has made itself felt. Doubtless you boys noted the veiled hostility of the natives and their reluctance to furnish us vegetables and fruit even in return for ample consideration. That is because the continued statement of The Prophet that the gods are angry with the natives for tolerating white men in their land is taking effect. What must those natives be who live beneath the shadow of the volcanoes and are in contact with The Prophet?

"Now here is what I am coming to. So hostile probably are the natives of the plains that it would be impossible for us to enter and photograph the volcanoes, the lava overflows, or wild game, unless we do something to overcome that hostility. And Mr. Ransome and I have decided that something can be done. If it succeeds, we shall have struck a blow for ourselves and the success of our expedition and he will have eliminated the menace of The Prophet.

"The plan is this. Two of you boys shall put up the radio station around camp here somewhere, and stick by it while the rest of us descend into the plain tomorrow and hunt out The Prophet's headquarters, providing Mr. Ransome's spies return with word that he has been located. With us we shall take a portable radio and loud speaker attachment.

"When we find The Prophet, Niellsen with his motion picture camera will probably be able to create a diversion by drawing the natives about him. And while that is going on, whichever one of you fellows is selected to accompany us will have to seize his opportunity to put up the radio in a good hiding place near The Prophet's hut.

"Then we will fight The Prophet with his own tactics, only going him one better. For we shall announce to the natives that we are emissaries from the outside world who have heard of The Prophet's misrepresentations. Instead of coming from heaven on Muhavura, we shall say, he comes from hell in Namlagira. And we shall add that we have been sent to expose him and to warn all natives against listening to his words lest they suffer a more dreadful calamity than any so far experienced.

"That's where the radio comes in. For after our bold declaration we shall send up signal rockets. And from that precipice out yonder, overlooking the vase plain and the crater region for a hundred miles or more in three directions, a man with spy-glasses will easily be able to see them. That will be the signal to you fellows left behind to speak over the radio in the guise of spirits denouncing The Prophet and announcing that he was about to be whisked away.

"When that message comes like a thunderclap from the concealed radio instrument which we shall have set up, its effect undoubtedly will be dismaying. In the ensuing confusion, Mr. Ransome's trusties will seize The Prophet and whisk him away.

"Well," he concluded, "what do you think of it?"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE MAN-APE.

LET us pass as quickly as possible over the subsequent discussion during which it was decided by lot that Bob and Frank should stay behind to operate the radio, while Jack should accompany the main party for the purpose of concealing the receiving set and loud speaker in an advantageous place.

Both Bob and Frank keenly regretted the necessity which would prevent them from forming part of the expedition, for they wanted very much to see the discomfiture of The Prophet. While as for Bob, he yearned to be present in case of a fight.

However, where necessity commanded, like good soldiers they could only obey. Half the force of bearers was to be left with them and two of the guards, including Samba. This latter trusted fellow, it had developed, was a native of this region who had been carried away by slave traders in his youth, and, therefore, knew the dialect. It was he,

accordingly, who would have to speak over the radio.

Early in the morning, Mr. Ransome's spies returned; before daylight, in fact, having set out from a village where The Prophet was located during the night and camped until the first faint streaks of dawn at the foot of the precipice, after which they had made their way up the height in short order.

The Prophet was located in a big village eight miles distant on the plain. They had marked the location well, and through glasses were able to point it out to Bob and Frank. Thus that there would be any difficulty in observing the signal rockets which Mr. Hampton would send up as a sign for Samba to "speak his piece" over the radio there no longer remained a doubt.

Welcome was the word of the spies that The Prophet, whose activities heretofore had lain in the central portion of the great plain, nearest the active volcanoes, and who only recently had invaded the fringes, had not yet aroused the natives to such a pitch of hostility against the whites as to make it impossible for Mr. Hampton's party to obtain a hearing.

"That's all we shall need," said Mr. Hampton, as all ready to follow the bearers and other members of the party down the steep paths of the preci-

pice to the plain, he and Jack paused for a last word with Bob and Frank. "Once we get a hearing, we can trust to the superstitions of the natives to do the rest."

They wrung each others' hands in farewell, and then the departing ones set out. Jack was elated, of course, at the turn of fortune which had made it possible for him to be "in at the death" as he phrased it. Yet he realized, too, that a considerable weight of responsibility rested upon him to see to it that the receiving set was properly hidden and in good working order.

As for Bob and Frank, when the others had disappeared around a turn of the path, dipping into a canyon, they swallowed their disappointment at being left behind and hastened away to take up their duties. Chief of which, of course, was the drilling of Samba not only in the message he was to utter over the radio and which he translated into high-flown native language, but also in coaching him how loud to speak into the transmitter, how close to approach his lips to it, and the proper tone to employ to achieve the best effect.

To descend the precipice and cross the plain to the village would take the slow-moving party much more time than it had the spies. It was not expected they would reach the village, in fact, until

late in the afternoon. Moreover, some time would be spent there in negotiating with the chief and in drawing off the crowd of natives from the vicinity of The Prophet's hut through means of Niellsen's motion picture camera, in order that Jack should have his opportunity to conceal the radio receiving set and the loud speaker.

It had been agreed, in fact, that by no means should Mr. Hampton call for the use of the radio until 8 o'clock that night. Accordingly, Bob and Frank, even after spending hours coaching Samba until he was letter perfect in his speech and likewise knew just how to utter it to obtain the best effect, still had time on their hands.

They had set up their radio station not far from the edge of the precipice, in order that the one watching for the expected signal should when beholding it be able to pass on the word at once to the one manipulating the station and directing Samba. In order that they would be able to keep the village which had been pointed out to them under their glasses after nightfall, they had planted two stakes in line with each other and bearing directly on the village, so that even in the thickest darkness glasses trained in the direction indicated by the pointers would pick out the signals.

But it was uncomfortably hot in the open sun

about the radio station, even at that altitude of 8,000 feet, and after work had been completed and everything was in readiness, Bob retired to his tent for a nap. Frank, who was not inclined to sleep, strolled around through the woods, which he found so strange as to be exciting.

It was his first experience in the untrodden woods of this mountain region, and had he realized the danger he would not have wandered from camp. For this mountain region is the home of the most terrible of all African animals, the great man-ape. Horribly human and yet inhuman in appearance, the gorilla lives in these trackless forests of beautiful hard-wood trees where flowering plants climb over trunk and bough in a riot of color and where the underbrush is so tangled as to be almost impassable. With the strength of a dozen men in his tremendous barrel-like chest and his over-long arms, is combined a ferocity unparalleled amongst wild beasts.

But Frank was not even thinking of gorillas as he forced his way through the thickets, admiring the beauty of blossoms which for the most part he had never seen before. Of one danger only was he fearful. That was of snakes. And to the fact that he kept his eyes darting here and there as he pushed tough vines aside or hacked at tangled underbrush

with the butt of his rifle in order to clear a path, he owed his salvation.

For the sight that met his eyes as he parted a great mass of tangled vines and found himself staring into a small clearing where a forest giant, smitten and blasted by lightning, had fallen and brought down with it a mass that now lay withered or dying the vines which had connected it with other trees, was such as to freeze the blood in his veins.

On top of the fallen trunk not twenty yards from him crouched a grotesque powerful gorilla with three slightly smaller brutes behind him. It was a male and three females.

Frank stood aghast, feeling the blood seem to retreat from his body, unable for the moment to move. Then he started to back away, as with a powerful effort of the will, he regained control of his limbs in a measure.

But the huge gorilla had seen him. And now he sent a challenge rolling and rumbling down the forest aisles in a tone that beginning low rose and rose in volume as he beat upon his chest with a drumming thud. A moment before the forest had been alive with the call of birds, but as the sound of that ferocious anger shattered the air, everything that spoke was stricken dumb. And when the

gorilla ceased his roar, the silence which succeeded was one of stark terror.

That Frank, too, was stricken with terror there is no denying. But as, after issuing his ferocious challenge, the great brute stood upright on its short bowed legs, and started running along the fallen tree trunk toward him, Frank realized he must act quickly if he were to save his life.

The sight of that tremendous barrel-like chest bent forward with the long grisly arms a-dangle to grip dead branches here and there and, with a heave of the powerful mis-shapen shoulders, pull the brute forward, made him a little sick. A vision of himself in the embrace of those arms, being crushed to death against that chest, flashed across Frank's mind. Then it was gone, and the coolness which usually came to his rescue in crises sprang into being now.

Raising his rifle and taking careful aim, he pressed the trigger. The gorilla was hit, but the shot was too high for the heart, passing through a lung. For a moment the great brute paused, swaying. Then he let out another vast bellow, which was cut short by a terrible coughing as the blood poured into his lungs.

The three females, frightened by the sound of the gun and more alarmed now at its effect upon

their lord and master, swung away into the trees. But the gorilla with that superhuman strength which he possesses was not to be downed.

As the coughing subsided, he gave another roar of pain and then sprang straight through the air toward Frank. White-faced and trembling, Frank yet realized that if he turned to run the gorilla would be upon him. So levelling his rifle again, he once more pressed the trigger. Shot in mid-career, the gorilla collapsed and fell in a huge huddle almost at Frank's feet.

About the fallen ape who twitched convulsively and then lay in a grotesque heap while his eyes glazed in death, there was at once something so monstrous and yet human that Frank felt his heart turn to water within him. And he realized then that he could not stalk and shoot gorillas in cold blood, and that if any of that were done some other member of the expedition would have the privilege of shooting the fourteen gorillas, thirteen now, which the Belgian government license permitted him to bag.

After one more look at the fallen monster, a look half-furtive, so quickly did he turn his glance away, Frank started retracing his steps as quickly as possible, following the trail he had blazed. And when on reaching their tent, he found Bob sunk in

sound slumber, he gazed at him unbelievingly before his legs gave way and let him down on a camp chair.

Could it be possible that while one boy slept, another should have been so close to a frightful death nearby?

CHAPTER XXVI.

MFUM-BA APPEARS.

HOURS later Frank was still shaking as he stood in the darkness on the edge of the bluff gazing through the night glasses in the direction indicated by the pointers and waiting for the signal rockets which he expected momentarily to see flare up from the village in the darkened plain far below.

Behind him at the radio station was Bob with Samba seated before the transmitter. Every wire had been gone over, the motor had been tuned and found to be in perfect working condition, and the two boys were confident of being able to carry out their part of the program.

In the grove in the background, Frank could see here and there the gleam of one of the cooking fires about which the bearers left to him and Bob were preparing their evening meal. With nothing to do that day, the bearers had enjoyed life by taking a long nap. Now they were up and about the fires, Frank knew, cooking and chattering. He

could even hear occasionally the sound of a laugh from the light-hearted fellows, louder than usual.

Well, they would need those fires, he reflected, not alone for the preparation of food but to provide warmth. At this altitude of 8,000 feet, the nights, as they had discovered the night previous, became very cold. In fact, Frank was wearing heavy canvass knickers tucked into high lace boots and the warmest sweater he could find, for the first time in months.

The presence of Bob not far away and of the bearers in the background, together with the glow of their fires, was welcome to the boy on lonely outpost above that pit of shadows into which night seemed to have flung a world of soft velvet.

For the forest world was awake. And now the quiet of day, broken only by bird calls or the occasional bark of a gorilla, had given way to a medley of terrfying sounds. The sobbing of leopards and cheetahs thrilled and vibrated mournfully. Constantly the boom of the gorilla cut across all other noises, aweing them into silence for a moment, after which they would begin again. Owls hooted, insects shrilled and hummed near at hand, about Frank's face. And from the distant plain below rose the shrill barking of a jackal pack pierced

through now and again by the mournful note of the hyena.

It was Africa. And by night Africa awakes. Frank was both fascinated and repelled. But with it all he was thrilled, too, thrilled at the thought that he had been lucky enough in his youth to be able to penetrate into the very heart of this most mysterious continent on the face of the globe, to behold its mysteries and wonders close at hand.

Suddenly out of that velvety darkness cloaking the plain a ball of fire soared upward followed by a glowing comet's tail of sparks, and then another and another followed.

Through the spyglass Frank could see them clearly, although he knew that in his remoter position at the rear, where the radio had been set up, Bob was unaware that the rockets had been touched off. He did not even wait to pick his cautious way back over the rocks, which were so uneven the boys had considered it best not to erect the radio station upon them, but, instead, put his hand to his mouth and called to Bob.

"All right? Have they signalled?" came Bob's hail in response.

"They've signalled," shouted Frank. "Let's go."

Then turning his pocket flashlight on the rocks in order to guard against either missteps or step-

ping upon a snake, he made his way to his comrade's side.

Samba was still speaking when Frank arrived, for he covered the intervening ground hastily when once free of the rocks. And as Frank, at Bob's finger on his lips, stood in silence looking at their strange broadcaster, he could not repress a smile. Samba was perspiring freely, although the coolness of night already had set in. And anybody unaccustomed to telephoning who has remained seated for any length of time at the instrument, will appreciate the nervousness from which the poor fellow suffered. But he was undaunted. And what was most to the point, considered Frank, was the fact that his nervousness was not betrayed in his voice. What it was he was saying in the dialect of the region, Frank of course could not understand. But Samba was delivering it with unction and solemnity, and Frank could not but reflect that in this semi-civilized man lay the makings of a remarkable actor. The truth is, of course, that primitive peoples naturally possess histrionic possibilities such as more highly civilized beings must strruggle and often without result to attain.

Turning toward Bob, Samba lifted his eyebrows in a funny quizzical glance, a question evidently as to what to do now. Bob could not refrain from

laughing. Placing a big hand over the transmitter, he asked whether Samba had said all that had been outlined to him to say.

The black nodded, and when Bob said "Well, that's all, then," and closed the circuit, he breathed a great sigh of relief.

"Him tough job," said Samba simply, running his big hand over his sweating shiny face. Then a look of pride crossed his features. "Him good job, hey?" he asked.

Both boys thwacked him heartily on the back.

"I couldn't understand a word of it, Samba," said Frank. "But it sounded mighty solemn and strong to me."

"Me, too," agreed Bob, slangily.

Samba grinned.

In the meantime, at the plains village made headquarters by The Prophet, raw drama was being enacted.

Entering in the late afternon, the party presented a not unimpressive array. At the head marched Mr. Hampton and Mr. Ransome, both lean, tall, capable looking, dressed in semi-military costumes of khaki topped by broad-brimmed campaign hats such as are still worn throughout the American West. Revolvers swung at their sides, rifles over their shoulders.

Behind marched the ten men of the guard in double file, shouldering their rifles and keeping step with military precision. And behind them came the fifty bearers, tall strapping fellows all and handy men with the long keen knives in sheaths at the waist. Lake natives selected at Masaka for their strength and intelligence, they were all picked men. And Mr. Hampton had impressed upon them the possibility of trouble and received from each the assurance that he would stand by in case of attack, but would give the native populace no cause for taking offense unless attacked.

At the head of the bearers marched Jack, it being agreed that it would be best for him not to appear with Mr. Hampton and Mr. Ransome when they dealt with the chief of the village in order that later, when he should slip away to conceal the radio, his absence would go unnoticed. As for the radio, it and the aerial and loud speaker were all packed in two small boxes borne by bearers in the middle of the line where they would be least noticed.

At the very rear of the procession moved Niellsen with his motion picture camera and tripod, two bearers carrying his film case. Rightly it had been figured that the front and rear of the procession were the two points of chief interest to onlookers, and that in placing Niellsen at the rear he would

become a center of attention. And that was the thing to be desired, when Jack should set about his appointed task.

Tall warriors, black as ebony, some like the Masai tribesmen who are the giants of Africa, attaining a height of six feet seven or eight, crowded around. With their great hide shields and twelve foot spears, they presented a threatening appearance. But none attempted to lay hands on the members of the column as it proceeded through the village toward the chief's hut. Indeed, the threatening presence of the gun-bearing guard had a salutary effect. Well enough did the warriors know the power of the white men's guns. In fact, envious glances were cast at the bearers by warriors desiring to possess a gun more than anything else.

Straight to the open space or central plaza of the village moved the party. Then Mr. Hampton and Mr. Ransome halted, and a tall commanding figure of a man somewhat advanced in years but still erect came to meet them. This was Chief Namla. Hobbling at his side, wrapped in a cotton blanket, moved a wizened figure with a face so old and wrinkled it was monkey-like.

Chief Namla halted some ten paces from the two white men, and the aged man-monkey beside him likewise came to a halt, staring at the strangers

with beady bright eyes. The chief's glance was cold and hostile, but that of the other, whom they took to be the tribal medicine man, contained a palpable if unspoken gleam of appeal which caused Mr. Hampton to start. What could the old medicine man have in mind?

It goes without saying that they had not invaded Chief Namla's village unprovided with an interpreter. But as this man stepped forward to speak, the two white men were dumbfounded to see the medicine man hold up a hand as if for silence. Then from beneath his enfolding dirty robe of cotton came a strange rattle, and over the faces of Chief Namla and the warriors drawn up in a rude semicircle behind him and facing the whites appeared an expression of awe.

"The spirits of Chief Namla's father speak and they tell the Wizard Mfum-ba to say that these white men come not as enemies but as friends. They bid Chief Namla to hearken to them," he cried.

And once more, while the amazed interpreter hastily translated for the benefit of the two white men these words uttered in the native tongue by the old medicine man did the latter let that unmistakable appeal for help appear in his eyes. Mr. Hampton felt he could not be mistaken. And the old wizard's words confirmed his impression. For

whatever reason yet to be explained, the Wizard Mfum-ba wanted the white men on his side.

"I have it," muttered Mr. Hampton quickly to his companion. "Look at that old fellow. He wants us to help him out of a hole. The Prophet is destroying his power amongst his own people, and naturally he hates The Prophet. We must manage to gain word with him aside. He may be just the man for our purpose."

Mr. Ransome nodded. Then addressing Chief Namla in a firm voice, he said:

"O Chief Namla, the fame of your land has drawn my companion here that he may see its wonders and carry back with him to the land of the white man across the mighty ocean a picture of all that he beholds. He has with him a magic machine which when pointed at a man, an animal or a mountain while the magician sets it in motion takes the likeness of that man or animal or mountain so that others thousands of miles distant may see and behold the same thing that he sees and beholds. This is a great magic, yet it does not take away anything from the man or animal or mountain and does not harm them in any way. He prays that you will permit him and his magician to travel in your country and point this machine at whatever pleases him. In return he offers such

valuable objects as are fitting for so mighty and powerful a ruler as Chief Namla."

Then, while the interpreter put this into the native dialect, Mr. Ransome bade the bearers to brng forward the trade goods to be offered the chief. Bundle after bundle was opened and laid at the chief's feet, consisting of many yards of gaudy cotton prints, bundles of brass stair rods, an entire box of fezzes both red and blue, a small set of dishes of gaudiest flowered pattern and, finally, topping the heap, a trade gun and box of cartridges.

Not until the last appeared did Chief Namla who stood with folded arms, relax his frowning expression. Then his eyes gleamed covetously, and for the first time he spoke.

"Let the white strangers rest in the guest house," he said. "I shall let them know presently what I decide."

The interpreter hastened to repeat this but almost before he had concluded speaking the wrinkled old wizard interrupted with a gabble of words, while again from beneath his robe sounded that mysterious rattling.

"Him say Chief Namla tell white men a' right," announced the interpreter hastily. Then he added on his own account: "Me think Wizard no want Chief go talk somebody."

"The Prophet," said Mr. Ransome emphatically, and Mr. Hampton nodded agreement. "You're right, Hampton. Mfum-ba fears the influence of The Prophet over the chief."

Nevertheless, that the chief intended to adhere to his resolve was soon apparent. For thrusting the old wizard aside impatiently, as if angered by his importunities, he indicated to some women who came running forward that the presents to him should be borne away, and then turned without more words and strode in the direction of a hut somewhat larger than the rest at one side of the square.

For the moment there was nothing to do except obey. And as the warriors melted away at a sharp command flung over Chief Namla's shoulder, Mr. Hampton and Mr. Ransome followed several women who approached and told the interpreter they were to lead the party to the guest house. This proved to be a commodious hut, entirely of grass, both walls and roof, standing on the right of the large hut into which the chief had disappeared and separated from it only by a narrow passage some eight feet in width.

The bearers squatted outside the hut, and the guards leaned against the wall, but the four white men of the party, for Jack and Niellsen had come forward to join the leaders, retired within for a

consultation. The hut was clean and free from odors, and with a sigh they sank down on the small mushroom-like stools standing about and relaxed.

"Nothing to do except wait, I suppose," said Mr. Ransome finally, after the matter had been discussed from various angles. "But if Chief Namla doesn't soon send for us, we shall have to take the next step. And that will be to summon him and inform him, as we planned, that we intend to invoke the white man's Great Spirit to rout his evil counselor, The Prophet. We shall have to speak without mincing matters, and carry it off with a high hand."

"Provided I can first find a way of fixing up the radio," said Jack. "And I believe that way already has been found. Did you notice the chief disappear into the next hut?"

The others nodded.

"Well, doesn't it strike you that if he was going to consult The Prophet, that gentleman is located inside there?"

"That's right," said Mr. Hampton.

"Only a narrow eight-foot alleyway separates the two huts," said Jack. "Suppose we placed the radio so that when Samba speaks his piece the voice will

seem to come from The Prophet's own hut? Wouldn't that be pretty effective?"

"It certainly would, Jack," said Mr. Ransome. "But how do you propose to do it?"

Before Jack could reply, there came an interruption from an unexpected quarter. The grass wall at the rear was parted, and between the bundles of thatch which closed again behind him entered none other than the wrinkled old medicine man calling himself the Wizard Mfum-ba. He looked from one to the other, then set his fingers to his lips, after which he spread out his hands as if in deprecation.

"I believe he wants the interpreter," said Jack, quickest to grasp the meaning of the gesture. And stepping to the doorway of the hut, he summoned the interpreter from the group outside. The old wizard's face showed relief at the fellow's appearance, and drawing him close he began to whisper to him. Several times the interpreter started to speak, only to be interrupted, but at length with a nod of the head and a low-voiced assurance, he turned from the old medicine man to Mr. Ransome.

"Him say much," he declared. "Too much me tell. But him mean Prophet bad man, take away honor from Mfum-ba so him be cast out by tribe unless him save face. Him say he help white men kill Prophet."

"We don't want to kill The Prophet but to capture him," said Mr. Hampton. "Look here, you ask him if he'll help us capture him and carry him away?"

When this was translated, Mfum-ba shook his head in emphatic assurance. Quite evidently he was willing to go any length to be rid of an obnoxious rival.

CHAPTER XXVII.

JACK WORKS FAST.

THEREUPON the four white men together with the medicine man and the interpreter put their heads together, with what result will presently be seen. And at length the Wizard Mfum-ba, after first poking an opening in the straw wall with a finger and peering out, parted the thatch sufficiently to permit him to slip out the way he had come.

"Well, things are looking up," said Jack. "But one thing puzzles me. Just one little thing. Did you all notice that out there in the square, whenever the old fellow spoke, his words were preceded by a peculiar rattling sound, a sound which caused a look of awe to appear on the faces of many of his hearers?"

"Oh, that nothing," said the interpreter, with the superiority of a man who has come in contact with civilizing influences and has lost his awe of home town ways. "Him carry li'l bag, made of skin, underneath him robe, filled with pebbles. When

him want to fool somebody him rattle bag and say spirits talk. My uncle," he added, "him medicine man, too."

At this naive remark, his auditors laughed heartily.

"Well, now, if there's anything to that medicine man, Chief Namla is due to appear," said Mr. Ransome.

And scarcely had the words been uttered than one of the guards putting his head inside the doorway announced the chief wanted them in the square.

"So far so good," said Mr. Hampton, rising with alacrity. "Mfum-ba has made good on one promise, anyway."

Then he added: "Bring your camera, Niellsen, and come along. Jack, I'll send your radio stuff in by bearer. Remember, my lad, everything really depends on you. But take no unnecessary risks."

"All right, Dad," said Jack, in a reassuring tone. "Leave it to me."

They went out, and in a few moments a bearer entered the hut with the two small cases containing the cabinet receiving set and aerial and the loud speaker. Putting them down he, too, retired. Jack was again alone. But not for long.

He could hear voices in the grassy square outside. And peering through the doorway, he noted

with satisfaction that the bearers had shifted position as if casually, so that now they stood in two groups, one of which effectively screened the doorway of the hut while the other blocked the alleyway alongside, between guest house and The Prophet's hut beyond.

Things were working out according to schedule.

When he turned around, there stood the Wizard Mfum-ba, hand outstretched to pluck him by a shirt sleeve to attract his attention. This, too, was according to plan, and well-pleased with the way things were going, Jack nodded. Then he picked up the two small cases, and, one under each arm, followed Mfum-ba through the parted thatch of the rear wall.

Beyond some twenty paces and stretching for a considerable distance on either hand lay an eight-foot-high wattled wall, surrounding the yard of Chief Namla's abode. Jack looked up and down the space intervening but it was deserted. He listened. From the square came the sound of Mr. Ransome's voice upraised in speech. And as it ceased, the hum of many voices filled with uncontrollable amazement succeeded.

But he must make the most of his opportunity. And already Mfum-ba had darted away from his side with surprising speed for one so aged, and

stood at the rear of the adjacent hut, which Jack knew was inhabited by the mysterious individual known as The Prophet. Immediately at the rear of this hut and towering above it rose a spreading tree of luxuriant foliage, a forest giant which had wandered down into the plain.

Mfum-ba beckoned impatiently, and Jack delaying no longer ran to join him. As he crossed the open alleyway between the huts, he gazed toward the square. But his view of it was cut off by the dense mass of bearers at the mouth of the alley, and so he knew that anybody looking in could not see him, either.

"Working like clock work," he thought.

To scale the tree was an easy matter. And putting down his two cases, Jack in a trice was in the lower branches. Then Mfum-ba handed up the case containing the radio receiving set and aerial, as Jack indicated. Mounting into the tree, which closed about him, concealing him completely, Jack carried the insulated wire of the aerial to the top, Pausing only in conclusion for a hasty glance through the branches toward the square, a glance which told him nothing. Descending, he placed the receiving cabinet in a crotch which had caught his eye as he passed, and where it rested as securely as if in a place especially made for it.

Working at top speed, Jack yet was careful that everything should be put in proper order. And when he had finished, he dropped lightly to the ground. The alley between the huts and the wattled wall was still deserted. And from the sounds reaching him from the direction of the square, Jack surmised his father and the latter's companions were successfully keeping the populace engaged.

Between him and Mfum-ba not a word had so far passed, for neither could have understood the other's tongue. But gestures were more eloquent than words. Mfum-ba parting the grass thatch at the rear of The Prophet's hut, as he had parted that of the guest house, stepped within, one skinny, claw-like black hand left behind and beckoning Jack on. Jack set his teeth, for the most dangerous part of his task yet remained. Then he, too, entered the hut by this novel method, pushing ahead of him the case containing the loud speaker.

The hut was empty save for Mfum-ba and himself. But curious though he was to discover something regarding the identity of this mysterious individual who inhabited it, Jack after a hasty glance around which took in the floor pallet, a writing case upon which lay a sheet of paper filled with fine writing in German script (that much he did

note), and a small box in one corner, proceeded to his task.

That was to fasten the loud speaker in the roof of the hut, so that the trumpet was on the outside but concealed by a light covering of straw. When it had been arranged to his satisfaction, and he felt certain it would stay in position and would not be discovered except by direct search, Jack poked the coil of wire with which to connect it to the receiving set out of the roof so that it rolled down and dropped into the alley at the rear.

Then, listening a moment to assure himself that the crowd in the square outside was still engaged, he indicated by signs to Mfum-ba, who stood near the doorway, alternately peering into the square and up at him, that his task was finished. And parting the thatch of the rear wall, he stepped out with Mfum-ba at his heels.

Then came the first upset in his schedule, which so far had gone along precisely as planned. For as Jack stepped through the thatch, he saw a tall Negro passing through the alley at the rear pause not a yard away from him and stare open-mouthed as if at an apparition. If the fellow gave the alarm, all would be lost. As this reflection flashed through his brain, Jack became desperate. Was all his effort to go for nought, because a chance passer-by dis-

covered him at that crucial moment? Not if he could avoid it.

With panther-like swiftness Jack leaped toward the Negro, and his right fist shot out and caught him beneath the ear with stunning force. The black toppled over without a sound, and Jack caught him in his arms as he fell. Mfum-ba stood behind him, wringing his hands, at this unexpected catastrophe. But the next second the old wizard's face became wreathed in fury, and whipping a knife from his cotton robe he would have plunged it into the heart of the poor fellow had Jack not dropped his unconscious burden and seized the wizard's upraised arm with a powerful grip.

Jack was almost frantic. Here he had an unconscious man on his hands, who, as soon as he returned to his senses, would give the alarm. And he had to deal with Mfum-ba or the latter would knife the Negro without compunction. To make matters worse, his task was not yet completed. The loud speaker had still to be connected with the receiving set.

Turning the man over, Jack tied his hands behind his back with his own belt, for the naked warrior had none which could be employed for that purpose. Then he seized him beneath the armpits and dragged him to the rear of the guest house, where, parting

the thatch, he tumbled him inside. Running to the doorway, he pulled one of the bearers standing outside with his back turned, watching events in the square, within, and indicated he should keep guard over the bound man.

Then again he pushed through the thatched wall, saw by a hasty glance that Mfum-ba was alone, and, picking up the wire which had fallen down from the roof of The Prophet's hut, he shinned back up the tree and connected it with the receiving set. Again he dropped to the ground and pulling Mfum-ba with him re-entered the guest house without discovery.

The bearer looked at him with lively curiosity, the bound warrior who had opened his eyes with the deepest respect mingled with fear, and Mfum-ba with stupefaction. But Jack wasn't caring who stared at him, or how. He had never worked so fast nor so furiously in his life, nor ever under such an impulse of fear. Throwing himself flat on his back he lay with eyes closed, resting, until his father's voice aroused him when, opening his eyes, he sat up.

"Where did this fellow come from, Jack? And did you manage it?" asked Mr. Hampton anxiously.

"I'll say I did," said Jack, and he explained what he had been through.

"What happened to you?" he asked. "Did things work out as planned?"

"Exactly as planned," said Mr. Hampton, while Mr. Ransome and Niellsen who stood behind Mr. Hampton nodded.

Then he explained that when summoned to the square they had found Chief Namla already there, surrounded by a big crowd of his people. In fact, everybody in the place was on hand, made curious to hear what the chief's answer to the white men's strange request would be.

"The chief asked us to show him our machine, as Mfum-ba had prompted him," continued Mr. Hampton. "So Niellsen set it up and let him look into the range-finder. When he saw reflected there every hut, distant volcano or warrior close at hand, at which Niellsen directed the camera, he was stupefied. That was what we had expected. And so we invited his chief men to step up and have a look. The crowd became more and more excited.

"Then we told the chief we had a communication from the Great Spirit of the white man to deliver." He paused, glancing at Mr. Ransome. "I thought you did that rather well, Ransome," he said, smiling. "Of course, I don't know just what hash the interpreter made of your remarks. But at any rate, they got across."

Mr. Ransome nodded.

"The Prophet was brought from his hut to face us," he said. And he laughed heartily, as if at some humorous recollection. "You could never imagine what he is, Jack," he said, "so I'll tell you. Of course, I can't be sure. But I believe he is one of these soured German professors, a man who doesn't know the Great War ended years ago. In his warped mind there is only one thought uppermost. And that is that Germany was martyred in the war, that all the world was against her without reason, and that he must obtain revenge. I think he is a little crazy."

"At any rate, he scorned us. 'Pigs, you think to scare me,' he said. 'It is you who shall pay with your lives.' Nevertheless, I think he was impressed at our promise to make the Great Spirit speak from the air at 8 o'clock tonight. And he'll be outside to listen. And so will everybody else in the place."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CONCLUSION.

SHARP at 8 o'clock, Mr. Hampton and Mr. Ransome set off the rockets in the square. And as they went up with their comet's tail of fire, the "Ohs" and "Ahs" of the natives could be heard all over the big enclosure ringed by its grass-thatched huts and lighted by a fire flaming in the center.

Then Mr. Hampton, who stood full in the glare, held up his hand for silence, and the interpreter cried that now the Great Spirit of the white men was about to speak.

To one side of the fire stood Chief Namla and beside him The Prophet, bespectacled and wrapped in a long white cotton robe. He looked both scornful and, to the keen discerning eyes of the only other white men, worried.

As for them, they were worried, too. They had cast all on this throw of the dice. Would they win or lose? Would everything go as planned? Or had Jack failed to connect the radio properly? Or

Frank and Bob fallen down on their part of the job?

Silence filled the great square, a silence accentuated by the deep breathing of the hundreds assembled, who waited for they knew not what.

Then it came. And what a feeling of relieved thankfulness filled the hearts and minds of the white men. Except The Prophet. He started in amazement, stared all about him as if in search of that strange voice—the voice of Samba speaking weighty words in the native tongue. As the voice concluded, amidst a stunned silence which had fallen upon the multitude, leaving them breathless, awe-stricken, mute, The Prophet turned furiously toward Mr. Hampton.

"Pig, dog," he cried, in a voice made squeaky by rage. "I might have known. It is only the radio. I shall show you up."

But he went alone. Of all those hundreds of natives who heretofore had been his admirers, his followers, almost his slaves, none would have dreamed of invading The Prophet's hut whence that voice came.

Mr. Hampton chuckled, and leaning close to his companion whispered:

"Jack was right. A scientific man couldn't be

fooled, but would realize we were using the radio. He is falling right into our trap."

Just what he meant could have been understood by anyone inside The Prophet's hut. For as the furious man, speeding to search for the radio receiving set which he now realized must have been concealed somewhere within, entered the pitch black darkness of the interior, strong hands closed about his throat, throttling all possibility of outcry. And then a gag was thrust into his mouth, and he was propelled through the parted thatch of the rear wall, where a half-score armed men tossed him up on a rude litter which they raised to their shoulders, after which they trotted off down the alley between the huts and the wattled wall of the chief's court-yard and were lost in the darkness.

As they melted away in the night, going in the direction of the mountain wall, eight miles away, upon which lay the expedition's camp, Jack looking after them heaved a tremendous sigh of relief.

"Whew," he remarked to Niellsen. "I'm glad that's done. But it worked to perfection, didn't it?"

Jack was correct. Men, women and children, every inhabitant of the village was in the square. And, therefore, none saw the shadowy forms of the guards pass between the last huts on the outskirts and disappear with their burden.

Nor were they destined ever to see The Prophet again. For, looking ahead, it may be stated that, kept a close prisoner but well treated during the ensuing weeks of the expedition's stay in that region, The Prophet, whose real name was Professor von Hertwig, was turned over on the return of the expedition to civilization to the Belgian authorities. Examined by alienists and pronounced insane, he was ordered sent to an asylum in Belgium. But on his way down to the coast under guard he contracted a tropical fever which caused his death.

That the man had not been acting solely on his own initiative but had been the tool of cunning minds still at large was the belief of Mr. Ransome, a belief in which Mr. Hampton concurred. But for the time being these "higher ups" remained quiet, and no trace of them could be found.

No trace of Mabele could be found, either. And it seemed likely that he had, indeed, been lost in the storm which swept Lake Victoria the day his stolen canoe was found overturned offshore. As to the radio set of which he had robbed the boys, it still is in all likelihood mouldering in its hiding place near Chief Ungaba's village. But as they never again passed that way, they could not very well organize an expedition to hunt for it.

A month more the party spent in the Mountains

of the Moon, photographing the volcanoes and obtaining some very excellent pictures of lions, leopards, Uganda cobb, elephants, herds of topi, reedbuck, hippopotami and wart-hog. Their bag of animals shot by rifle instead of camera also grew apace.

As for the natives, they could not do enough to display hospitality toward the expedition. For the story of the voice from the sky which had condemned The Prophet to his doom passed from mouth to mouth throughout the vast district faster than if it had been telegraphed, it seemed. At any rate, it had preceded the party wherever they went. And it grew in the telling, so that before long the natives were telling of how after the voice from the sky had spoken, The Prophet was seized by red demons and hurried away into the bowels of Tamlagira, which opened to admit them, displaying the eternal fires of hell leaping high.

Toward the end of their stay, the members of the expedition made their way to Lake Kivu, cupped gem-like amidst the mountains of the mighty Ruwenzori range. And here, in what is perhaps the only considerable body of water in all equatorial Africa which is free of crocodiles, the boys spent their days mainly in or on the water until finally the last leg of their wonderful trip was made to a little port on the western shore of Lake Victoria,

whence they were carried by steamer to Kisumu and by rail to Nairobi.

There, after assembling their thousands of feet of film and their many trophies of hide and horn, they went by rail to Mombasa and after shipping by coastal steamer to Zanzibar, transshipped to a larger vessel which carried them up through the Suez Canal to Marseilles. And so at length, aboard a great trans-Atlantic liner, the Radio Boys returned to New York.

Historic though their trip had been, never had they been so glad to see the Goddess of Liberty. As they moved slowly up the harbor in the tow of puffing, busy little tugs, all three lined the rail and solemnly saluted her.

With this, we shall bid farewell to the Radio Boys for the time being, feeling assured that, no matter what their future adventures, if they acquit themselves as well as in Darkest Africa they will be doing well, indeed.

THE END.

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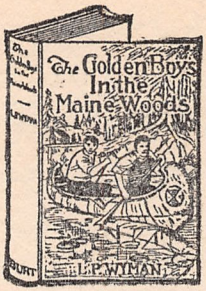

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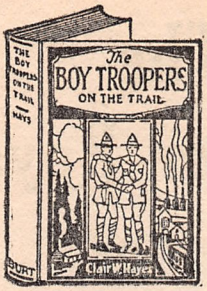

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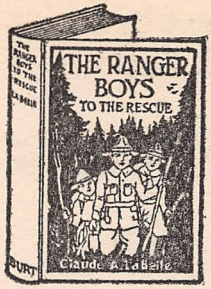

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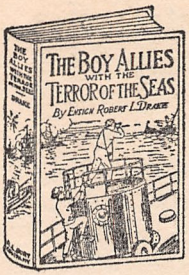

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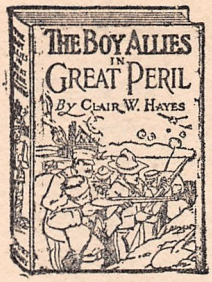

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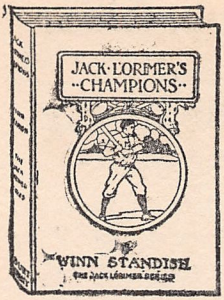

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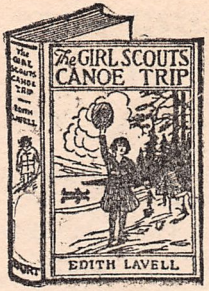

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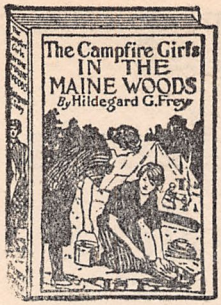

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